DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Self Against Others

A Psychoanalytical Reading of Harold Pinter's Work

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Award date:
2015

2015

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude, first of all, to Andrew Roberts, for his insightful and patient guidance whilst writing this thesis, as his perceptive feedback helped me to refine my thinking on Pinter's work.

I would also like to thank my family (in particular, mum, dad, gran and Uncle Jimmy) for their financial support whilst I completed my doctoral work. It is for a very good reason that I am the first in my family to submit a PhD thesis: coming from a Dundee working class background, money has always been 'tight', and normally the funds would simply not have been available. I therefore appreciate their collective financial sacrifice in making this possible.

My friends have, as always, been a source of great companionship, which was especially needed when I was faced with the arduous task of defining my position on a writer not renowned for his simplicity. I am particularly grateful that I could discuss my thesis with them, and that they could help me articulate just what I thought about these challenging works of literature.

I would also like to thank my counselling colleagues; in particular, my fellow counselling students. Whilst they may not have directly helped me to refine my ideas, they did, in our triad practice sessions, diligently and compassionately listen to whatever emotional issues that were preoccupying my attention at that time. This emotional support did indeed make the writing of this thesis that bit easier.

Finally, I want to thank Professor David Punter and Professor Mark Robson for a rewarding, indeed illuminating viva discussion.

Dedicated to the memory of my grandfather, Jim Valentine (1922-2008)

Declaration

I, Alex Fox, certify that this thesis has been written by me, that it is a record of work carried out by me, that all references cited have been consulted by me, and that it has not been previously accepted for a higher degree.

Date: Signature:

I, Andrew Roberts, certify that the conditions of the relevant Ordinance and Regulations have been fulfilled.

Date: Signature:

Abstract

This thesis critically examines some of the plays of the playwright, screenwriter and poet, Harold Pinter, in order to argue, first of all, that he was a writer of psychological realism, and that his *oeuvre* can, in the main, be defined as a body of psycho-political works. My essential contention is that Pinter's defining interest in power relations, coupled with his dedication to exploring how psychological 'realities' shape these said relations, implies that he is a playwright, who generally wrote psycho-political works.

In the main body of the thesis, I then offer eight close readings of Pinter's plays, which are essentially informed, in their respective ways, by theories drawn from the post-Freudian school of thought, most notably Winnicottian object-relations theory (indeed, the common feature of these otherwise disparate theories are that they all explore how the self is constituted and/or influenced by its relationship with the other). Whilst there were a number of themes that could have been selected, my decision to focus on the themes of authoritarianism, territoriality and of patriarchy was not arbitrary. Apart from an appeal to quantitative considerations (i.e., that these themes recur again and again at different stages of Pinter's career), my main reason for including them is that they are defining features of power relationships in general. For example, if one construes power as 'power-over' others, then a psycho-political exploration of power necessitates that the malignant form of authority (i.e., authoritarianism) be examined; likewise, if sexual politics involves, as Pinter, for one, contends, power reified as the possession of a particular sex (i.e., patriarchy), then again this suggests that this theme is of central importance in the psycho-political taxonomy of power.

The final part of the thesis explains how the three central themes can be considered to be inter-related in general and in Pinter's work in particular. Furthermore, the thesis conclusion also provides several possible criticisms of Pinter's psycho-political approach to power (e.g., a social materialist position contends that 'psychologising' power relations obscures the central importance of how distal powers construct oppressive political relationships).

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this introductory chapter, I intend to argue, first and foremost, that Harold Pinter's plays are works of psychological realism. My approach is to begin by defining two important, and seemingly divergent dramatic traditions (absurdism/social realism), as I believe that one of the main reasons for Pinter's originality was that he integrated, albeit unintentionally,[1] stylistic and thematic features which belonged to these different genres.

Once I have explained how the dramatic form of his plays emerges organically from a selective integration of these traditions, I then proceed to characterize his works in a more precise fashion. In particular, I will argue that much of his oeuvre consists of what could be called 'psycho-political' works, mainly because, as Robert Gordon puts it, 'The ceaseless desire for power is the prime motor for the action in almost all of Pinter's drama'.[2] Although I will shortly explore this matter in more detail, I believe that, providing we accept that Pinter wrote psychologically realistic plays, it is but a small step to see why his oeuvre mainly consists of psycho-political works. This is because power is an inherently political theme (perhaps the political theme *par excellence*), and so Pinter's fidelity to this theme, combined with his particular, one might almost say obsessive, emphasis on the psychological dimensions of the dialectic of dominance/subservience, defines the nature of his work as psycho-political.

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[1] There are two main reasons why it is unlikely that Pinter deliberately integrated features of social realism with absurdism. Firstly, Randall Stevenson quite rightly argues that Pinter was more influenced by the modernist novel than by plays ('Harold Pinter–Innovator?' in *Harold Pinter: You Never Heard Such Silence*, ed. by Alan Bold (London: Vision Press, 1984), pp.29-60 (p.29)). Secondly, these new and rather subversive dramatic forms were emerging at roughly the same time as Pinter was penning his own works.

[2] Robert Gordon, *Harold Pinter: The Theatre of Power* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2013), pp. 1-2.

In the final part of this chapter, I consider alternative ways of reading Pinter's oeuvre. Most of what I shall describe will be relevant in as far as it allows me to define for my readers certain key concepts that are integral to my own reading. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I have chosen to read his work from a psychoanalytical perspective, as I see this approach as one of the most respectful of Pinter's emphasis on the psychological dimensions of power relations. More fully, as the reader will note as he follows my argument, although I utilise some standard Freudian ideas, I am essentially nomadic in my appropriation of psychoanalytical theory, since I wish to be respectful to what I interpret as the psycho-political subtlety of the individual plays that are analysed herein. Nevertheless, since psycho-political drama shows how the interpersonal domain shapes, and is shaped by psychological factors, theories from the object-relations school of psychoanalysis will constitute much of the critical repertoire that I draw upon, as this particular tradition examines relationships in terms of relational needs and phantasies

Dramatic Form: Pinter's psychological realism

When Pinter first started writing plays in the late 1950s, two different theatrical movements challenged ticket office orthodoxy, as they sought, in their respective ways, to undermine the worldview of the bourgeois naturalistic play. What united these dramatists was the conviction that the 'drawing room' play 'represented the ingrained, unthinking conservatism of the comfortable English middle classes'[3], as such works never subverted, in the final analysis, middle-class values, since they portrayed, with a fidelity to detail, the mores and morals of this class. These new dramatists either believed that West-end standard fare refused to engage with the great existential questions of the age or they construed such plays as guilty of a failure to

[3] David Pattie, *Modern British Playwrighting: The 1950s: Voices, Documents, New Interpretations* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), p. 122.

examine class divisions, and how they impacted on the lives of working-class British people. In short, neither of these movements placed much value on 'mere' entertainment.

The first of these dramatic traditions came to be classified, for reasons shortly to be explained, as absurdist drama. In this particular case, these writers'[4] dramatic imaginations were inspired by a metaphysical dilemma that had become, in the post-war years, a timely social problem. Since the period of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, European society had found its direction, its sense of purpose from what postmodernists term 'grand narratives', as these narratives, with their positing of an ultimate goal, legitimized progress and acted as the guarantor of meaning. After the Second World War, however, the modernist subject suffered an acute crisis of confidence, as adhering to these supposedly rational grand narratives had led to the most irrational and terrifying of outcomes: rationality and utility had formed an inextricable and unholy alliance, which culminated in millions of people having been slaughtered in concentration camps. As Martin Esslin explains, these zeitgeist trends helped to form the premises upon which absurdist theatre is based:

> The hallmark of absurdist theatre is that the certitudes and unshakeable basic assumptions of former ages had been swept away, that they had been tested and found wanting, that they have been discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions…All of this was shattered by the war.[5]

[4] Two of the most distinguished writers in this tradition are Eugene Ionesco (1909-1994) and Samuel Beckett (1906-1989). Their most famous works are, respectively, *Rhinoceros* (1959) and *Waiting for Godot* (1953).
[5] Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (New York: Vintage-Random, 1961), pp. xviii-xx.

As Esslin intimates, these absurdist writers presented audiences with a powerfully discomforting vision of life, where existence, in the metaphysical sense, was perceived to be meaningless, as basic assumptions about the world's purposefulness had been challenged; indeed, these playwrights portrayed the search for a transcendentally meaningful life as a delusive escape from encroaching despair, and, as such, any remedy was seen as a hubristic attempt to flee from a world that was now known to be unyieldingly indifferent to the human plight.

If it was the case that absurdist theatre constituted a new, if somewhat disconcerting, addition to the British theatrical landscape, then the other movement, known as 'kitchen sink' realism, can seem like a less radical departure from the bourgeois naturalist play, since the emphasis remains on a realistic portrayal of what is perceived, by the playwright, as social reality. In some respects this criticism may be true, because, unlike absurdist theatre, social realism was not provocative primarily due to its seemingly bizarre dramatic form; yet, social realists, such as John Osborne[6], would no doubt have classified the metaphysical musings of the absurdists as reactionary, since his group wished to be provocative through laying bare the nature of British class conflict. As the phrase 'kitchen sink' drama encapsulates, these playwrights sought to show middle-class audiences, who were used to 'soporific and comfortingly familiar plays'[7], what it is like to live at the gritty, subsistence level. Furthermore, and above all else, such playwrights wanted to show these middle-class audiences that they were the haves, who were, as they sat comfortably in their expensive theatre seats, watching the trials and tribulations of the have-nots. Thus, the fundamental challenge posed by this drama was this: middle-class complacency rests upon material privilege, which, in turn, is founded upon material exploitation.

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[6] His play, *Look Back in Anger* (1956) is seen as a defining work in this genre.
[7] Pattie, p.122.

When Pinter's first few plays were produced, it is no surprise that most critics overlooked, or misinterpreted his originality, as there was a tendency to label what was subversive as being an example of either absurdist or social realist drama. For example, after a 1958 production of *The Birthday Party*, a critic wrote in *The Cambridge Review* that Pinter was inclined towards absurdism, and that he was indebted to Ionesco's theatrical innovations:

> Mr. Pinter is a lively and assimilative new talent, and his play, originally announced under the balder title of *The Party*, owes much to Ionesco, whose influence on British theatre may ultimately prove insidious as it now seems, to those sated with West End dreariness, as promising.[8]

Irrespective of whether this drama critic is correct or not about Ionesco's influence upon the young Pinter, this reviewer is nevertheless wrong in categorizing the playwright as an absurdist writer, even at the time that Pinter wrote *The Birthday Party*. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, Pinter is a political writer, which means, by definition, that he believes that oppression matters, and that suffering is not merely 'senseless' or 'absurd'; rather the kind of suffering that is caused by overt violence, or the more insidious attack on the integrity and autonomy of the self, is what interests this writer. As Robert Gordon puts it:

> Whether, as more recently, concerned with state abuses of power, or with the micropolitics of human relations that constitute the key motif of his work until 1981, much of Pinter's drama examines both the brute reality and the language

[8] 'Review from the "Cambridge Review", http://www.haroldpinter.org/plays/plays_bdayparty.shtml [accessed 3 April 2015]

> of power, so that a paradoxical continuity can be traced from his early–apparently apolitical–attitude, and his later, explicitly political plays.[9]

Secondly, if we are to consider the dramatic form of the Pinter play, it shows little sign of being constructed to portray an absurdist vision of life. Although Esslin included Pinter in his seminal and defining study of the genre, entitled *Theatre of the Absurd* (1961), his own summarising of the salient differences between the 'good' play (his ironic term for the 'well-made' (or well-behaved) bourgeois realistic play) and absurdist works implicitly rules out the playwright:

> If a good play must have a cleverly constructed story, these have no story or plot to speak of; if a good play is judged by subtlety of characterization and motivation, these are often without recognizable characters and present the audience with almost mechanical puppets; if a good play is to hold the mirror up to nature and portray the manners and mannerisms of the age in finely observed sketches, these often seem to be the reflections of dreams and nightmares; if a good play relies on witty repartee and pointed dialogue, these often consist of incoherent ramblings.[10]

Even a cursory examination of Pinter's work shows that they possess a plot, that they contain characters that are clearly individuated, each with a degree of internal consistency, and that they feature dialogue that is rich with meaningful subtext. In essence, one of the main reasons that Pinter does not adopt the absurdist form is that he wishes to maintain the conventional connection between action and character

[9] Gordon, p.3.
[10] Esslin, p.4.

psychology, as the meaning of his characters' actions are in principle intelligible (even if, as is so often the case, they try to frustrate being known by speaking in an elliptical fashion).

Still, it is understandable why critics did (and still do) miscategorise Pinter as an absurdist writer. Pinter's plays not only refuse, like traditional linear drama, to offer any kind of clearly defined resolution, but also their emotional impact often suggests the absurdist's aim of reflecting the seemingly irrational sphere of life, namely the realm of 'dreams and nightmares'. In Esslin's discussion of Ionesco, he provides a cogent explanation for this kind of 'evocative' effect, as he argues that it is 'by combining …evocative emotional images into more and more complex structures'[11] that theatre is transformed 'into an instrument for the transmission of more complex human situations and experiences'.[12] In other words, in such plays, the intangible realities of life (feelings and motivations) are conveyed through the changing repetition of key iconic images, which creates overall a unity (or 'condensation') of thematic meaning.[13] Although I will return to this issue later, it is the case that Pinter's plays are often 'symbolically charged' on a macro and micro level, suggesting a close affinity with absurdist theatre's desire to convey complex emotional states, which are never explicitly stated.

Whilst the absurdist label proved misleading in many respects, this nevertheless did not mean that Pinter was straightforwardly a member of the school of

[11] Esslin, p.155.
[12] Esslin, p.155.
[13] This idea of 'changing repetition' may sound paradoxical, but what it implies is that certain images may accrue meaning by recurring in different contexts, such that their thematic import is gradually modified and elaborated upon over the course of the play. For example, at the beginning of *A Slight Ache*, Edward's pain around the eyes can be taken literally; however, over the course of the play, his encounter with the blind matchseller lends it new meanings, as it becomes a signifier of his encroaching old age and death, and of his hubristic refusal to acquire in-'sight' into his own psyche.

social realism either. Yet some critics did fall into this critical 'trap', which was easy to do, for reasons that Randall Stevenson articulates:

> The prior appearance of such 'kitchen sink' domestic realism in the work of Osborne and other 'Angry Young Men' led some early critics to associate with them the shabby milieu of Pinter's plays, and his meticulous reproduction of a range of speech patterns, including those of the lower classes, and of down-and-outs.[14]

It is true that early plays, such as *The Caretaker* (1960), do portray 'shabby' milieus, but the label of social realism refuses to 'stick' to the works themselves for two main reasons. Firstly, Pinter was never entirely invested in portraying the world of the working classes, as even his early plays, like *A Slight Ache* (1960), depict middle-class life. Secondly, and more tellingly, Pinter's plays do not quite explore, as the social realists do, the 'dialectic between an individual's subjectivity and objective reality'.[15] To translate this into more prosaic terms, and, at the risk of caricature, the social realists chart out their plays according to the following schema: event → reaction (motive) → action. This schema cannot, however, be mapped onto Pinter's plays without obscuring a central aspect of his work: what he explores is not so much how his characters adapt to (or conflict with) objective social reality, but rather how their 'reality' is an 'in-between' (or transitional) construction, consisting of a merging of what is found, and what is phantasmal. Thus, for reasons to be discussed shortly, Pinter's emphasis lies with examining the psychological preconditions for certain power relations, as those power relations are not primarily explored as objective

[14] Randall Stevenson, p.50.
[15] Georg Lukacs, 'The Ideology of Modernism', in the *Lukacs Reader: A Survey*, ed. by Arpad Kadarky (London: Blackwell, 2002), pp.187-210 (p.192).

realities (although they do, of course, exist), but as phantasmally-infused political relationships.

Since Pinter's work seems to stubbornly resist easy critical classification, I believe that it is helpful to turn one's attention to what the playwright himself has said about his dramas. Whilst Pinter dislikes labels, seeing them as a straightjacket that the author must escape from, he did make a seemingly defining statement that has subsequently become a bone for the critic to chew on: in an interview, the playwright remarked, 'What goes on in my plays is realistic, but what I'm doing is not realism'.[16] This is indeed an intriguing, and initially somewhat enigmatic statement from the playwright, as Pinter notably commits to verisimilitude, which is one of the defining features of any kind of realism. For example, in his 1962 speech at Bristol University, he says that it is his willingness to explore a set of characters, situated in a specific social milieu, which provides him with the impetus to start writing a play:

> I have usually begun a play in quite a simple manner; found a couple of characters in a particular context, thrown them together and listened to what they said, keeping my nose to the ground. The context has always been, for me, concrete and particular, and the characters concrete also. I've never started a play from any kind of abstract idea or theory and never envisaged my own characters as messengers of death, doom, heaven or the milky way or, in other words, as allegorical representations of any particular force, whatever that may mean.[17]

[16] Harold Pinter, qtd in Ronald Knowles', 'Pinter and Twentieth Century Drama' in *The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter*, ed. by Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.75.
[17] Pinter, 'Between the Lines', *The Sunday Times* (4 March 1962), reprinted in *Harold Pinter: Plays: 1* (London: Faber, 1991), p. ix.

Pinter's working 'method' (if it can be called that) seems congruent with the aims of realism, as he shows a marked loyalty to depicting a concrete, recognisable world, which implies that he is aiming for a certain kind of accuracy of presentation. My view is that Pinter's statement makes most sense if we interpret his approach as distinct from social realism (which, I believe, he equates with realism), and see his fidelity to actuality arising from his commitment to portraying psychological realities. J. Chesley Taylor and G.R. Thompson helpfully define this kind of drama, known as 'psychological realism':

> In addition to suggesting the accurate rendering of concrete details from man's physical environment, [psychological realism] refers to the detailed, sometimes almost clinical fashion in which man's inner world of emotions and mental processes is examined. The great significance of the drama of psychological realism, then, is that it subordinates all of man's external reality to the internal reality of his psychological self.[18]

Taylor and Thompson's most significant remark in this passage is that psychological realism 'subordinates all of man's external reality to the internal reality of his psychological self'. When it comes to drama, this would be a curious, and very difficult position for a dramatist to adopt if taken too literally, as dramatic conflict remains the pre-eminent reality; in fact, unlike the modernist 'interior' novel, psychologically realistic drama explores how the 'outer' world of relationships and conflicts is determined by the 'primary' reality of the inner life.[19] In the case of Pinter,

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[18] J. Chesley Taylor and G.R. Thompson, *Ritual, Realism and Revolt: Major Traditions in the Drama* (New York: Scribner, 1972), p. 244.

[19] Remarking about the characters in *The Homecoming*, Pinter said, 'Still, they aren't acting arbitrarily, but for very deep-seated reasons' (qtd. in Victor L Cahn's *Gender and Power in the Plays of Harold*

one can observe such features in his work, as there is an 'accurate rendering of concrete details from man's physical environment', but this fidelity to detail serves the purpose of exploring how these familiar and pervasive relationships are influenced, and to a significant extent, constituted by particular psychological realities.

Since Pinter writes psychological realistic plays, there is still the unanswered question of why the playwright contrasted realism with realistic, as this suggests that his oeuvre is stylized in some unarticulated fashion that precludes, in his view, the possibility of them being works of social realism. To define this 'stylization', we can consider T.S. Eliot's definition of 'poetic drama':

> It [poetic drama] should remove the surface of things, expose the underneath, or the inside, of the natural surface appearance. It may allow the characters to behave inconsistently, but only with respect to a deeper consistency. It may use any device to show their real feelings and volitions, instead of just what, in actual life, they would normally profess or be conscious of.[20]

Although Eliot's rich description of 'poetic drama' does not explicitly mention psychological realism, it is clear that they have to be equivalent, as any extensive and realistic dramatization of the inner life must draw upon literary tropes to convey subtle and complex emotional realities, which are hard to capture discursively. As Eliot articulates, poetic drama, like psychological realism, adheres to a metaphysics of 'depth', as it is a dramatic form that implies 'interiors' and 'hidden depths', which

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Pinter, 2nd edn (Oregon: Resource Publications, 2011), p.12). This statement also applies to most of his other characters, as they too are motivated by their elemental needs.

[20] T.S. Eliot, qtd in F.O. Matthiessen's, *The Achievement of T.S. Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p.155.

suggests that the world of outer action becomes symbolically representative of the reality of what is happening 'within'. Now, since this kind of drama relies upon the connotative force of language and action, this implies that what is said and what is done begins to acquire, over the course of the play, a symbolic charge that is faithful to inner realities, but cannot always be taken, in terms of action, as being literally true; in other words, when a Pinter play seems to take a bizarre and almost inexplicable turn, this is because the inciting incident may appear to be social realism, but, as the inner reality is elaborated upon and perhaps transformed, the action becomes a 'realistic objective correlative' of those conflictual motives, and deep-seated phantasies. For example, Rose's blindness in *The Room* (1957) cannot be taken to be literally true, in terms of an actual physical condition; instead, it conveys how the protagonist has returned to a state of self-deception that makes her 'blind' to any self-knowledge that she has painfully acquired.

At this juncture it is worthwhile to examine further how Pinter conveys the underlying inner worlds of his characters. In my view, he does this in four main ways. Firstly, like his absurdist counterparts, he creates actions that coalesce into symbols that are rich in their associations about the inner life; where he differs, however, from these contemporaries, is that his symbolic meanings do not portray, so abstractly, any grand postulate about existence, nor do they posit the inherent unintelligibility of life and of the self. Rather, Pinter's symbolic meanings intend to convey, as Eliot suggests, the underlying consistency of the inner life, even if that means invoking the idea of unconscious motives and feelings. Secondly, Pinter uses the rhythms of demotic speech to convey not only a literal meaning, but also a symbolic rendering of a character's inner life. F.J. Bernhard writes:

> Any single line of dialogue might be taken as realistic prose. But in the construction of the play as a whole, the words have a consistent rhythmic construction and a symbolic charge that lift them beyond conventional realism.[21]

As Bernhard's remark intimates, it is this 'symbolic charge' that moves Pinter's plays 'beyond conventional realism' into the realm of psychological realism, as the dialogue points to what lies 'underneath' in a character's psyche. Indeed, one can see how this stylistic device could serve the purpose of signifying what is, in a psychological sense, hidden, as this kind of dialogue mimics, in a heightened form, how repressed ideas, containing their own 'charged' energy, recur in a person's speech, yet they may never assume any directly conscious form. Thirdly, Pinter's characters are fond of telling narratives that either constitute an attempt to keep the other at bay and/or provide some substantiality for an otherwise precarious identity. Such narratives also often contain a 'latent' meaning that can be revelatory about the character's deeper needs and phantasies. Finally, Pinter's characteristic use of pauses and silences punctuate the dialogue, and leave 'space' for inferred meaning. In the following passage, Pinter himself explains why he uses these rhetorical devices in his work:

> You and I, the characters which grow on a page, most of the time we're inexpressive, giving little away, unreliable, elusive, evasive, obstructive, unwilling. A language, I repeat, where under what is said, another thing is being said.[22]

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[21] F.J. Bernhard, 'Beyond Realism: The Plays of Harold Pinter', *Modern Drama* VIII (1954), 185-191 (p. 185).
[22] Pinter, *Plays 1*, p.xiii.

Any audience member watching a Pinter play will observe that even if the characters have their garrulous moments, they all, without exception, exhibit a paranoiac reticence when it comes to their psychological vulnerabilities, as they see life as a jungle, where such exposure could allow another to assume dominance. Pinter's pauses and silences therefore 'speak', as they tell an otherwise untold tale of insecurity; indeed, their connotative force comes from the fact that they point to the 'landmines' that are buried deep in the psyche, and thus, through omission, they draw attention, like a selectively darkened room, to the fact that something is 'hidden' from view.

Pinter as a psycho-political writer

In his study, *British and Irish Political Drama in the Twentieth Century*, David Ian Rabey makes the following distinction between social and political drama: social drama 'purports to act as an impartial report on social relations, or to focus on specific social abuses, without stepping over into an attack on the fundamentals of society in question'[23]; in contrast, political drama 'views specific social abuses as symptomatic of a deeper illness, namely injustice and anomalies at the heart of society's basic power structure'.[24] Apparently Rabey is making the claim that political drama is essentially a more 'penetrating' form of writing than social drama, as the former seeks to locate and portray the 'underlying' insidious power structures. My question would be this: can the portrayal of a specific social abuse omit the examination of 'underlying' power structures? The answer I believe is 'no', for the reason that, if a playwright portrays a social abuse, then it is necessary for him to depict, at least to some degree, the relevant power structures that directly caused the abuse (i.e., a socially endorsed form of power) or allowed it inadvertently to happen (i.e., a misuse

[23] David Ian Rabey, *British and Irish Political Drama in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), p.2.
[24] Rabey, p.2.

of a socially endorsed form of power). To phrase this another way, when a play depicts a social abuse, it must credibly answer why the oppressed was subject (i.e., vulnerable) to that abuse; this leads to some implicit explanation in terms of power. In general, then, I believe it is important to stress that the portrayal of 'local' abuses of power nevertheless constitutes an attack on some of the fundamental power structures in a society; this point is indeed vital for understanding Pinter, as the personal is intertwined with the political, mainly because this playwright often construes the macropolitical in terms of the micropolitical.

Assuming Rabey's description of political drama as the genre that exposes the nature of a society's power structures is correct, I find it intriguing that he invokes a medicalized metaphor to define power inequalities, as he calls them a kind of 'illness'. This raises the following question: what is the essential nature of this 'illness'? No definitive answer can be given, as it depends on the playwright's political affiliations, and his underlying worldview; nevertheless, there are two main philosophical ways that an answer could be framed, in terms of how the 'inner' world of subjectivity relates to the 'outer' world of social structures. Firstly, as discourse theorists contend, power is constitutive of subjectivity, such that the subject is situated in his society, according to the interplay of the subject's discursive worlds. This philosophical viewpoint therefore construes the world of subjectivity as a social construction, which undermines the view that the psychological realm possesses an essential nature that can only be modified, but never definitively changed, by social influences. According to this view, the 'illness' lies within the social structures and their discursive presentations.

Another, perhaps more conventional view is that, if power structures are oppressive and 'ill', this is because there is a disturbance in the holistic 'field', in the

sense that a 'healthy' and harmonious negotiation between the inner psychological world and the outer social world has not been achieved. Nevertheless, according to this view, even a society's 'ill-health' is due to the inter-relationship between the psychological and the political. This is because the 'deviation' from what constitutes a healthy and humane society must be expressed both in oppressive forms of social organization, and in corresponding forms of psychopathology. Consequently, if we adopt this philosophical stance, Rabey's invoking of the idea of 'illness' becomes less metaphorical, as this worldview contends that psychological illness is the supporter of oppressive and exploitative power relations, where 'support' here means the psychological contribution to the overall holistic disturbance.

Considering Pinter's own work, it is relatively straightforward and uncontroversial to categorise him as a political writer. As I intimated earlier, Pinter's great theme, his abiding obsession, is defining and exploring the nature of insidious power relations. Michael Billington, for one, agrees with this classification when he writes:

> Eric Bentley in a classic essay pointed out that much drama that people loosely call 'political' might be better termed 'social'. 'It would be more sensible', wrote Bentley, 'to limit the term political to works in which the question of the power-structure arises'. Which it does throughout Pinter's entire *oeuvre*.[25]

One of the most curious and interesting aspects of Pinter's work is that as soon as one defines him as a political playwright, as I have just done, it becomes necessary to

[25] Michael Billington, *Harold Pinter* rev. edn (London: Faber, 2007), p.89.

qualify this somewhat. Before doing this, I want to draw upon another of Rabey's statements about political drama:

> Political drama emphasizes the directness of its address to problematic social matters, and its attempt to interpret these problems in political terms. Political drama communicates its sense of these problems' avoidability, with implicit or explicit condemnation of the political circumstances that have allowed them to rise and continue to exist.[26]

Rabey assumes here that political drama emphasizes the political structures that create and perpetuate political oppression. This is true, but one may ask: since Pinter is a writer of psychological realism, who is also obsessed, in the most creative of senses, with the theme of power, how can his work be more precisely defined? My concise response to this is to define Pinter, in the main, as a 'psycho-political' writer.[27] The reason why I append this attribution to Pinter's work is that, whilst he does explore, as a political writer must do, power structures, his emphasis is not primarily on those power structures. Instead, as a psychological realist, the question that motivates much of his work is this: what psychological realities correspond to certain power structures?

Given that Pinter can be defined, in the main, as a psycho-political writer, I wish to discuss briefly some of the distinguishing features of this kind of writing,

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[26] Rabey, pp.1-2.

[27] I contend that Pinter is, *in the main*, a psycho-political writer, as some of his plays are difficult to classify under this label. For example, *Betrayal* (1978), which was written during his 'memory' period, is a work that is hard to classify as psycho-political, as the play's relationships do not seem to have any wider political resonance. Another example is his play, *Mountain Language* (1988), which is again difficult to classify as psycho-political, but this time the reason is quite different: although it is overtly a political play, Pinter is interested in dramatizing a dehumanizing regime, which denies oppressed groups the right to use their native tongue and to articulate their subjectivity; thus, in keeping with its theme, the characters are not endowed with much psychological complexity.

including what I take to be its strengths and limitations. Firstly, and rather unsurprisingly, psycho-political drama is concerned with the individual's emotional investment in key power relations, as this taps into what fears, phantasies and desires correspond to the disharmonious social structures. Billington alludes to this when he suggests that Pinter's work, over the course of his career, has portrayed intimately personal bonds as the psychological 'reality' that perpetuates power structures:

> As Pinter's career proceeds, he increasingly sees private life as a form of power politics full of invasion, retreats, subjugations and deceptions. Conversely, when he later comes to deal quite overtly with the machinery of the state, he describes it in terms of individual power and powerlessness. To put it simply, marriage for Pinter is a highly political state, just as the relationship between torturer and victim often acquires a degree of marital intimacy.[28]

In essence, then, psycho-political writing is both concrete and abstract: concrete because it explores what psychological factors support insidious power relations, and thus there is an emphasis on emotional investment, which means that the portrayal of the social sphere represents what the individual directly confronts and responds to with the depth of his being (in other words, individuals in drama are generally not emotionally invested in abstractions). Related to this, psycho-political drama is also abstractive, as its psychodynamic emphasis overlooks how distal powers might create, and perpetuate power structures–indeed, psycho-political drama fails to intimate the sheer scale and differential complexity of global power. Thus, psycho-political

[28] Billington, p.89.

drama's relative 'abstractive' quality has the following consequences for my interpretation of Pinter's work: in my close readings of his plays, I will allude to the social and historical contexts where relevant, but I will not be exploring these in great depth, given that my focus will be the same as Pinter's, namely on the purported psychological realities that support the power relations that are depicted.

Secondly, another distinguishing feature of Pinter's work as a political writer is that he problematizes Rabey's view that political drama 'communicates its sense of these problems' avoidability'.[29] From a Marxist point of view, for example, Pinter's political pessimism can be attributed to the smallness of his dramatic 'canvas', as his plays portray conflicts between a small number of characters, who are hermetically 'sealed' in their rooms; thus, they do not give an audience a sense of contingency, because the plays do not expose the network of power from 'top' to 'bottom', which would then provide intimations of how the structure could be changed. In response, this is a genuine criticism of Pinter's work, but it would be wrong to leave it entirely unchallenged, as it does rest upon a simplification: yes, Pinter's work may lack this kind of 'comprehensiveness', but, on occasion, it partly redeems itself by substituting the power of evocative symbolic imagery for comprehensiveness. For example, there is no extensive tracing of the power relations of industrial capitalism in *The Dumb Waiter* (1957), but the use of the central conceit, namely the dumbwaiter mechanism, defamiliarizes the power relationship between the 'haves' and 'have-nots', such that the audience can see, perhaps for the first time, the central exploitative power relation between workers and their bosses.

There are nevertheless deeper reasons for Pinter's political pessimism, ones that are organic to his very approach and worldview. A psycho-political writer, by

[29] Rabey, p.2.

definition, must posit that the ability to cure the 'illnesses' of the social world is limited by the realities of our all-too human psychological nature; in other words, whilst we may conceive of a democratic society, the psycho-political writer would argue that it is only feasible if our psychological 'reality' permits it. Pinter would no doubt concur with this, as his plays often show how power relations are rendered almost inevitable by the deep-seated conflicts of human nature. For example, in *One for the Road* (1984), Nicholas' autocratic attitude can be construed as a manifestation of an infantile, regressive mind-set, which is nevertheless much easier to 'inhabit' than the anxiety-producing democratic mentality. In conclusion, the more 'limited' a psycho-political writer believes human nature to be, the more entrenched will be their political pessimism.

Pinter as a 'psychoanalytical' writer

An important question to ask regarding the interpretation of Pinter's work is this: assuming that he is a psychological realist, and a psycho-political writer, what psychological theories are relevant for studying his oeuvre? Perhaps an answer can be unearthed from considering Robert Gordon's perceptive remark about Pinter's dedication to portraying the apparent 'irrationalities of human behaviour':

> The seeming illogicality of motive and action in Pinter's plays involves an innovative dramaturgical means of portraying the irrationality of human behaviour itself rather than a technique for producing purely aesthetic effects.[30]

[30] Gordon, p.9.

Earlier, I quoted Eliot's remark on the purpose of poetic drama and it is worthwhile to quote him again, as his remarks illustrate how this form can examine the 'irrationality of human behaviour':

> It [poetic drama] should remove the surface of things, expose the underneath, or the inside, of the natural surface appearance. It may allow the characters to behave inconsistently, but only with respect to a deeper consistency. It may use any device to show their real feelings and volitions, instead of just what, in actual life, they would normally profess or be conscious of.

As Eliot contends, in order to understand a seemingly irrational contrast between avowed motives and feelings, and what a person actually does, one must invoke the notion of an underlying consistency–a sort of 'counter-will' that is in conflict with the individual's consciously avowed commitments. To do this is to tame the 'irrational', as the individual's actions–their 'acting out'–are rendered explicable, and therefore they are rationally motivated. This key explanatory move is indeed typically, albeit not inevitably,[31] associated with the discursive world of psychoanalysis, as Freud proposed, as his main hypothesis, the existence of an unconscious realm, which was in conflict with the conscious mind, thus causing the individual to act, at times, in 'symptomatic' and apparently senseless ways. Since Pinter is committed to portraying the seemingly irrationalities of human behaviour, one compelling way of conceiving his characters' psychologies are in ways that are akin to the psychoanalytical model of the mind.

[31] For example, Herbert Fingarette, in his book *Self-Deception* (1969), provides a Sartrean-inspired account of the notion of 'counter-will'.

In this section, I want to explore further the kinds of psychoanalytical theory that fit well with Pinter's oeuvre. To do so, I wish to clear the path, so to speak, by examining a few prominent psychoanalytical readings of Pinter's plays, as their respective weaknesses highlight the way to proceed.

The first interpretation of this kind is one offered by Lucina Paquet Gabbard, in her book *The Dream Structure of Pinter's plays: A psychoanalytical approach*. As the title discloses, Gabbard's central critical ploy was to treat a Pinter play as though it were a dream to be interpreted in Freudian style, as she argued that the dramatic text was a camouflaged concoction that expressed, in a wilfully distorted fashion, an unconscious wish. According to this interpretation, a Pinter play is the 'manifest content', and the main task for the critic is to uncover, by undoing the defence mechanisms of condensation and displacement, the underlying desire known as the latent content.

In spite of this methodological approach possessing some cogency, there are nevertheless some evident problems with this interpretation. With respect to its strengths, Gabbard's reading is a nuanced and rigorous attempt to explain the mystery and power of Pinter's drama using Freudian dream theory:

> The realistic reading can be compared to the manifest dream; it is concerned with current events. This current realism, however, conceals associated memories that are condensed beneath it. These hidden determinations are the unconscious or sometimes preconscious life of the play. They create its ambiguity, its depth, and its power.[32]

[32] Lucina Paquet Gabbard, *The Dream Structure of Pinter's Plays: A Psychoanalytical Approach* (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1976), p.23.

Gabbard contends that the realistic elements of the play are a front for a disguised wish, just as the 'day residues' are weaved together, in novel and surrealistic combinations, to express underlying desires. Yet, the difficulty about this sort of psychoanalytical reading is that, although it offers a credible explanation for why Pinter's plays deviate from the genre of social realism, the purported analogy between dreams and his works may ultimately fail to explain the playwright's dedication to depicting psychologically realistic characters, which are far more internally consistent than those figures, which populate dreams; furthermore, a related difficulty is that, if Gabbard's analysis were to be extended to Pinter's work after the publication of her study (i.e., his explicitly political period that began in the nineteen eighties), its credibility would be diminished, as the analogy between his plays and dreams could indeed appear to be 'deflective', in the sense that the political relationships are reduced to being displacements of an underlying order, rather than what needs to be essentially understood. Overall, a psychoanalytical reading that posits that the psychodynamic features reside in how actual relationships are influenced, and, to some extent, constituted by inner conflicts would be the most respectful of Pinter's psycho-political emphasis, whilst also agreeing with his devotion to portraying psychologically realistic characters.

Another early psychoanalytical reading was proposed by Lois Gordon's *Strategems to Uncover Nakedness: The Dramas of Harold Pinter*. Compared to Gabbard, Gordon focuses on the inter-subjective dimension of Pinter's work, rather than construing the plays as a series of dreams. Her reading is influenced by the Freudian view that there is a central, and ultimately irreconcilable tension between the instinctual demands of the individual and the responsibilities of society:

> Pinter's aim is really, as Freud's was, 'Civilisation and its Discontents'. There is something about the nature of the individual that is incompatible with the communities of men.[33]

Gordon advocates that Pinter, as an artist and humanist, takes the side of the individual against society, and that his work is a critique of a social contract that alienates man from his deepest feelings:

> Pinter's assault is levelled at the sources responsible for this terrible disparity between one's acts and impulses–civilization itself. All societies, he seems to be saying, have taught that one must repress his deepest feelings, for once they force themselves into actual behaviour, they are vile and irreversible. In effect, Pinter condemns the initial contract that man makes with society, the unmanageable, indeed unworkable, negotiation of man and *all* institutions.[34]

I would like to suggest that the main weakness of this reading is that Pinter supposedly depicts the individual as essentially in conflict with society. This raises the following important question: does Pinter, as a psycho-political writer, portray the relationship between an individual and his society always as a conflict? My answer would be 'no', as his interest, as a psycho-political writer is to articulate the psychological predispositions that result in oppressor/oppressed being attached to authoritarian regimes. In some respects, this writer is more pessimistic than the founder of psychoanalysis, as Pinter understood that even the oppressed may reconcile themselves to their exploitation, precisely because these insidious

[33] Lois Gordon, *Strategems to Uncover Nakedness: The Dramas of Harold Pinter* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969), p.8.
[34] Gordon, p.8.

relationships nevertheless become a means to express, rather than repress, the individual's deepest needs and phantasies.

With these critiques in mind, I propose that the kind of psychoanalytical reading that is most faithful to Pinter's psycho-political works is one that respects and explores how the inner world shapes human relationships, and, just as importantly, how the outer world of relationships shapes the inner world. In essence, what I am proposing is that, since Pinter views power relations as an interweaving of the psychological and of the political, any psychoanalytical theory, Freudian or otherwise, that is applied to any particular work must be a theoretical perspective that has, as its focus, the connection between psychological dynamics, and the structure of actual human relationships. Indeed, whilst some Freudian ideas will be invoked, my critical repertoire will mainly draw upon post-Freudian theory for the following basic reason: whether such theory takes a Langsian, Winnicottian or Lacanian form, each is a revisionary account, which foregrounds the relationship between self and other.

Alternative ways of reading Pinter's work

Performance Readings

Since Pinter is a playwright, and drama is the literary genre of action, it is unsurprising that some critics would choose to focus on the performative features of his work. I do not deny the value of such readings, because, without question, how a play is staged reveals a great deal of what a dramatic work is interpreted as meaning. Furthermore, it is also true that, whilst a play may be read, it is only fully realized when it is performed.

I say the above not only sincerely, but also in the spirit of concession, as I am aware that, in this thesis, I will not be examining the performative aspects of Pinter's work. Nevertheless, I do not consider this exclusion as quite a damning omission, for

the following two reasons. Firstly, from a critical perspective, a skilful performance of a play reveals and elaborates upon the possible meanings inherent in the play, but the text itself is the foundation, and all performative interpretations must be tested for 'coherence'. I can therefore conclude that my close readings would be richer if I considered some of the ways in which the plays were performed, but I do not believe my focus on the text precludes my readings from being essentially coherent with the work's purported thematic meanings. Secondly, since Pinter is a psycho-political writer, who intimates through his writings his characters' depth psychologies, most of my focus is on what is inferred from what is said and done. Once again, a performative reading, with its examination of the signification of apt actions, can help to examine these psychologies, but a close reading of the text still allows key (i.e., foundational) inferences about the characters to be made. In fact, a focus on the textual helps to 'unearth' the rich, connotative meanings of this poetic dramatist's dialogue.

Philosophical Readings

Philosophy can be defined as the 'study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, especially when considered as an academic discipline'.[35] In terms of literary analysis, it is possible, in principle, to offer a philosophical reading of any literary work, for the simple reason that philosophical concerns are so comprehensive in scope and therefore so inescapable; thus, every text, knowingly or unknowingly, involves the presentation of some philosophical theme (even if that theme is not explicitly mentioned, and even if it is not insightfully presented). Nevertheless, the fact that there exists the genre of 'philosophical literature' highlights an important distinction: while all texts adopt a philosophical stance, what is

[35] Definition of philosophy in *Oxford Dictionaries*, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/philosophy [accessed 3 March 2015]

categorised as philosophical literature are texts that can be described as philosophy *as* literature; in other words, a philosophical reading of a particular literary work is especially warranted, where normally discursive themes are explored concretely and extensively in the text itself.

When it comes to Pinter's work, as a whole, I believe that his fundamental philosophical concern is posed in the question: what is the nature of power? Since Pinter is, in the main, a psycho-political writer, his answer is fundamentally that power relations are revelatory of particular psychological realities. Of course, this answer, like all responses to the above question, is predicated upon an underlying philosophical worldview, but I would argue that Pinter is not primarily writing philosophy as literature. Indeed, as the quote made clear earlier, Pinter, as a psycho-political writer, is dedicated to developing very concrete scenarios into plays, and so his explicit intentions cannot be defined as philosophical in orientation.

In this section, I want to examine further what Pinter's perspective on psychology may imply about his underlying philosophical worldview. To help me to do this, I will use some excerpts from Walter Kerr's short book on Pinter and existentialism, as Kerr's anti-essentialist reading will open up the discussion. In this work, Kerr bases his reading of Pinter upon the Sartrean credo, 'Existence precedes essence', which means that humankind is not endowed in the womb with a fixed and definite identity; instead, whatever 'essence' one does acquire is a result of a 'posthumous' examination of one's acts, as identity is a construction that is always subject to further revision. Kerr explains these points as follows:

> Existentialist philosophy, moving from troubled speculation in the nineteenth century to aggressive assertion in the twentieth, reverses the Platonic order. It

> insists that existence precedes essence. That is to say, the notion of an original, immaterial archetype is jettisoned. There is no matrix from which individual men in the concrete are drawn. There are only individual men, born undefined. It is not even possible to say what a 'man' is until we have seen how this man or that man actually behaves, until we see what this man or that man has done. Man does not come to the planet with an identity; he spends his time on the planet arriving at an identity.[36]

After this explanation of what he means by existentialism, Kerr proposes that Pinter is an existential writer, paying him the compliment that he is the only existentialist playwright (so far), who has been able to marry harmoniously content and form. As Kerr phrases it, Pinter 'writes existentialist plays existentially'[37], as he explains that the playwright's characters mimic the real-life process of self-definition:

> If existence does precede essence, if an actual thing precedes an abstract concept of that thing, then it should also do so on the stage. Exploratory movement in the void, without preconception or precommitment, should come first. Conceptualisation should come later, if at all.[38]

Although this talk about 'exploratory movement in the void, without preconception or precommitment' may seem cryptic, what Kerr means is that, in a universe where there are no essences, individuals are 'free' to explore possibilities before committing to a particular contingent identity. Given the prior definition of Pinter as a psycho-political playwright, who explores how people are bound to pernicious power relations, Kerr's

[36] Walter Kerr, *Harold Pinter* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1967), p.10.
[37] Kerr, p.11.
[38] Kerr, p.11.

view that the playwright's characters move about 'without preconception or precommitment' does not seem to me to be an auspicious way to begin his critical reading.

Before articulating my own interpretation of Pinter's view on identity, it is worthwhile to consider further Kerr's thesis, since a counter-reading can indeed help to distinguish my own emphasis. With this in mind, in another excerpt, Kerr provides some further support for his main contention that Pinter is an existentialist writer, who writes 'existentially':

> 'I don't conceptualize in any way', Pinter has said in an interview given to Lawrence M. Bensky for *Paris Review*, a statement which may well be taken at face value and which may help to explain why Pinter's plays seem strange to us through and through.[39]

For Kerr, Pinter's remark is an expression of a playwright who lets his characters exist before they explore various forms of self-definition; in other words, according to Kerr, Pinter's characters are not the embodiments of some pre-conceived idea. But Kerr is unfortunately being disingenuous here, as the quote is lifted from an interview, where Pinter is emphasising the point that he does not outline his plays before starting to write them. In my view, what Kerr has done is misconstrue 'conceptualizing' as meaning that Pinter's characters are not originally defined, but that they come to be defined. In reality, however, Pinter's 'strangeness', as Kerr puts it, originates, in part, because of his dedication to psychological realism, since he lets his dramatis personae's characters primarily emerge through relationships, rather than by the

[39] Kerr, p.14.

means of expository information. To put it bluntly, Pinter's characters are not so much undefined as that their natures go unannounced; the playwright indeed understands that life is not lived with a voice over.

If the anti-essentialist reading seems unpromising, then Pinter's own remarks appear to undermine its credibility even more, as an excerpt from one of his most notable speeches makes clear:

> Given characters who possess a momentum of their own, my job is not to impose upon them, not to subject them to a false articulation, by which I mean forcing a character to speak where he could not speak, making him speak in a way he could not speak, or making him speak of what he could never speak. The relationship between author and characters should be a highly respectful one, both ways. And if it's possible to talk of gaining a kind of freedom from writing, it doesn't come by leading one's characters into fixed and calculated postures, but by allowing them to carry their own can, by giving them legitimate elbowroom.[40]

Although it cannot be literally true about his characters possessing autonomy, it is nevertheless revealing that Pinter treats his characters as autonomous agents; furthermore, and more importantly, he invokes the idea of credibility and of truth, in the sense that, in his view, he must be faithful to their defined identities, as it is these identities that delimit the realm of the possible. Assuming, as I do, that this little manifesto on characterization is representative of the playwright's general attitude

[40] Pinter, *Plays:1*, p. vii.

towards depicting his characters, this therefore raises the following important question: must Pinter be described as an essentialist?

The short answer to the above is 'no'. The longer answer is that, in spite of Kerr failing to provide particularly compelling reasons for a Sartrean reading of Pinter's plays, I do not believe that it is in principle impossible to offer such an interpretation. More fully, although Pinter's characters do not in general exhibit much freedom in the Sartrean sense, their apparent 'fixity' can still be explained in terms of not only a refusal to 'spell-out' the implications of their actions, but also an unwillingness to admit that those said actions are chosen rather than pre-determined.[41]

Nevertheless, with this concession having been made, I am choosing to interpret Pinter as an essentialist, as I seek to show that particular psychoanalytical readings of his plays can provide compelling and comprehensive psycho-political interpretations. More fully, I propose as a 'working hypothesis' that identity, for Pinter, consists of a set of factors, such as a character's traits, defining motives and needs, characteristic phantasies, and interpersonal style, most of which is influenced by the environment that the characters are situated in. Overall, I am fully aware that this 'hypothesis' has different political implications to the Sartrean reading, as my approach suggests that Pinter's characters, including the most exploitative and authoritarian, are more compelled than free, as they are, to a large extent, the playthings of their unconscious minds.

Gender Readings

Rather unsurprisingly, the category of 'gender' is a vital critical concept to be kept in 'play' when reviewing and interpreting Pinter's work. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, as will become clearer in a later chapter, Pinter typically equates authoritarian

[41] For a fuller philosophical discussion of these themes, see Herbert Fingarette's *Self-Deception* (1969).

societies with patriarchal structures, and therefore the way in which he construes the relationship between society and the individual inevitably draws upon the connections between gender and power. Secondly, and perhaps more obviously, Pinter's plays often directly stage the supposedly perennial battle between the sexes, as his characters situated in their rooms seek to achieve dominance over both the space and over others.

Although it is incontestable that gender concerns must be taken into account when providing readings of Pinter's work, critics have however been divided over how to interpret the playwright's understanding of the notions of masculinity/femininity. For example, Victor L. Cahn suggests that Pinter strongly favours the theory of biological essentialism i.e., that masculinity and femininity maps directly onto sex:

> Pinter implies that much of the behaviour of men and women is the product of their nature. In his plays, social and linguistic manifestations are not causes of the roles the characters play, but products.[42]

Other critics have challenged Cahn's straightforward reading in a variety of ways: Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson proposed a constructivist interpretation of Pinter's work,[43] which is premised upon the idea that gendered identity is a social construction, such that there is no inherent link between social role and biological sex; in contrast, Elizabeth Sakellaridou indirectly contested Cahn's thesis in less divergent terms by suggesting that Pinter's later work (beginning, it would seem, during his 'memory' period) depicts a more androgynous world, where men and women can

[42] Cahn, p. 12.
[43] For a fuller discussion of these points, see Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson's *Harold Pinter* (1983).

sometimes be found to possess traits of character normally attributed to the opposite sex.[44]

With regards to my own critical stance on the question of gender, it coheres with my more general commitment to reading Pinter's oeuvre as works of psychological realism. More specifically, I wish to reconcile, as much as possible, the tensions between Cahn's interpretation and Sakellaridou's. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, unlike Almansi and Henderson, I interpret the language of Pinter's characters as an invitation to posit an underlying nonverbal inner life that is consistent enough with what is said. Thus, my construal of Pinter's work is based on the premise that the social roles that his characters enact represent, to some extent, masks, which not only hide their inner lives, but also hinder their psychological development (for example, his masterpiece of sexual politics, *The Homecoming* (1964), may be viewed as an indictment of patriarchal society, which ordinarily suppresses a woman's sexual appetite, so that she can play the more submissive and subdued role of wife and mother).

Secondly, in my opinion Cahn's reading possesses some cogency, as Pinter's non-'memory' works generally suggest that there is a relationship between gender and sex, since men, for example, are consistently portrayed as the more violent and domineering of the sexes. However, with that having been said, Sakellaridou's interpretation also has its merits, because, even if Pinter's characters are not typically androgynous, some of his personages feel, think and behave in ways normally attributed to the opposite sex e.g., in *No Man's Land* (1975), Hirst's genteel, if somewhat boozy camaraderie, hides a more touching, and in Pinter's world, more feminine need for relationship; in contrast, a female assistant in *The Hothouse*

[44] For a more in-depth discussion of androgyny in Pinter's work, see Elizabeth Sakellaridou's *Pinter's Female Portraits* (1988).

(1958/1980) is clinically 'objective' and exercises her aggression through her sadistic 'scientific' experiments, and so she can be construed as 'masculine', given her lauding of reason and her domineering interpersonal style.

Taking these considerations into account, I believe that the way to make Cahn and Sakellaridou's readings consistent with the notion that Pinter wrote works of psychological realism is to define the playwright as a psychological essentialist when it comes to matters of gender. More fully, what this means is that gender is viewed as neither a given, nor a complete construction, as the social constructionists might claim; instead, one's character is a bundle of tendencies that, from the beginning, enters the field of social forces and is shaped by them. Consequently, whilst the psychological essentialist may describe masculinity and femininity in terms of contrasting qualities, he also argues that neither sex has an inherent and complete monopoly on those qualities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have established that I wish to read Pinter, in the main, as a psycho-political writer, and that my methodology will consist of psychoanalytical approaches that are focused on the relationship between self and other. In the next three chapters, I intend to look at three 'Pinteresque' themes, namely the authoritarian society, the 'territorial imperative', and the patriarchal family structure. I do not intend to argue that these three themes encapsulate all of the defining features of 'Pinterland',[45] but I do believe that, for reasons that will become clearer later, these are central themes. Briefly, my reasoning is as follows: firstly, the most oppressive societal structure is the authoritarian society, and so an examination of Pinter's psycho-political writing necessitates an exploration of how he conceives the psychodynamics of autocratic

[45] For example, a notable omission is an exploration of the theme of memory in Pinter's work.

relations; secondly, the hermetic retreat into a room, with the subsequent battle for territory, is perhaps the most defining feature of a Pinter character's being-in-the-world, and thus I believe it is necessary to examine the psycho-political subtext behind why his characters apparently need to flee from wider engagement in the world in order to construct a 'burrow'; finally, the need to examine, in a psycho-political fashion, familial structures is premised upon the idea that Pinter construes the family as the micropolitical structure par excellence, as it is the prototype for the patriarchal order.

In terms of the rubric of each chapter, it will be as follows: several plays, which thoroughly explore the chapter's theme, will be subjected to close readings from a psychoanalytical perspective. Each reading will involve a presentation of the relevant theory first, before proceeding to close read a particular play.

Chapter 2: Escape from Freedom: The Seductions of Authoritarianism

Introduction

In a 1960 BBC interview, Pinter criticised what he thought was contemporary drama's misguided tendency to present society as the villain and the individual as a hero. According to Pinter, the relationship between society and its citizens is instead an interdependent one, such that it is impossible to construe one party as the culprit, whilst exonerating the other:

> In contemporary drama so often we have a villain society and the hero the individual…Well it isn't like that. These two things (the man in relation to society) both exist and one makes the other. Society wouldn't be there without the man, but they're both dependent on one another and there's no question of hero and villain.[46]

Although Pinter speaks openly and almost declaratively about this topic, it nevertheless seems a curious approach for him to adopt, as any Pinter enthusiast knows that the playwright often portrays society as a coercive, corrupting force that is hell-bent on undermining the development of all of the qualities in an individual that he, as a liberal humanist, holds dear: a sceptical, open mind, a flexible, considered moral viewpoint and a unique voice. Could it be the case that there is an inconsistency between the writer's political philosophy and his actual work?

In reality, Pinter is guilty of no actual contradiction, as he rejects this melodramatic presentation of society and the individual for a very specific reason: as a psycho-political writer, he cannot exonerate the individual from responsibility, since

[46] Pinter, qtd in Billington, p.89.

his dramatic approach is based upon finding the deep-seated individual needs that support (i.e., 'prop up') various kinds of political 'ills'. Thus, for Pinter, individuals are not so much bound by force to autocratic societies as seduced by them.

In this chapter, I wish to examine Pinter's dramatizations of the seductions of authoritarianism by offering close readings of the following plays: *The Birthday Party* (1957); *One for the Road* (1984); and *Party Time* (1991). Firstly, I will argue, using some of the insights of adaptive (a.k.a. communicative) psychoanalysis, that Pinter's *The Birthday Party* suggests that certain individuals–the Stanley Webbers of this world– comply with the dictates of authoritarian, paternalistic societies as a form of penance for committing the 'original sin' of attempting to become 'exceptional'. Pinter's first full-length play is indeed a work of great psychological penetration, as it shows, rather counter-intuitively, that an individualist nevertheless longs, on some level, to comply with a traditionalist and freedom-denying society. More specifically, what I hope to show is that the Langsian interpretation of death anxiety can provide a compelling and overarching explanation for why Stanley Webber submits to the coercive order that he ostensibly despises.

With regards to offering close readings of two of his later works–*One for the Road* and *Party Time*–I shall provide the reader with a sense of how Pinter construes the motivations of what can be termed the authoritarian personality. What I intend to argue is that Pinter's understanding of the autocratic self is essentially in agreement with two of the central figures of the object-relations school, namely D.W. Winnicott and Margaret Mahler, as this playwright contends that the autocratic individual needs, on a cognitive and corporeal level, to divide the world into clear factions, because he cannot reconcile himself to true otherness; instead, he must exert 'omnipotent' control over his world in the vain hope of maintaining a delusory belief in his own

'unlimited' power. More fully, using some of the foundational notions of Winnicottian theory, I wish to show firstly that the autocratic personality is unable to relinquish the seeming epistemic security that the stage of omnipotence provides, and so he is condemned to viewing others not as separate individuals, but as either supporters of his underlying project, or dissenters, who must be persecuted (or, as he sees it, eradicated or 'corrected') because they threaten his precarious psychological equilibrium. Secondly, some of the insights of Mahler's developmental theory will be used to understand the psycho-political subtext of *Party Time*, as her hypothesis about the existence of a symbiotic stage provides a means of understanding the connection between the autocratic self and the gendered (i.e., 'hypermasculine') corporeal form that it assumes.

The Birthday Party

When Pinter's first full-length play, *The Birthday Party*, made its 1957 debut, it both baffled and irritated many London-based critics. For example, a *Guardian* journalist, known only as MWW, wrote, 'What all this means only Mr. Pinter knows, for his characters speak in non-sequiturs, half-gibberish and lunatic ravings'.[47] This journalist is very much wrong about the play's coherence, but he got one thing right: Pinter himself was always clear about his play's theme, as he proposed, in a letter to director Peter Wood, that *The Birthday Party* depicts the following 'message':

> We've agreed: the hierarchy, the Establishment, the arbiters, the socio-religious monsters arrive to effect alteration and censure upon a member of the

[47] MWW, qtd in Samantha Ellis, '*The Birthday Party*, London 1958', in *Guardian Online* http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2003/apr/02/theatre.samanthaellis [last accessed: 4 March 2015]

> club who has discarded responsibility (that word again) towards himself and others.[48]

As one might expect from a perceptive writer like Pinter, he is accurate about his play's central theme, as it is the case that the play stages a battle between the emissaries of the Establishment, and a lone outsider, who does not wish to conform to autocratic rule. Nevertheless, even Pinter's perceptive remarks do not fully explicate the psycho-political complexities of this work. Ann C. Hall, for one, provides an excellent counter-example to the notion of a clear-cut 'villain'/'hero' dichotomy:

> Once Goldberg finds the flashlight, we are aligned with him again, and our gaze is forced upon Stanley, who is not escaping, not helping Meg, but instead, is poised over the unconscious Lulu in a position suggesting rape and laughing maniacally. There is no hero here, no innocent or noble character with whom we can identify.[49]

If we take into account that Stanley intended to end the evening's 'celebrations' with a rape, Pinter's much-quoted comment that 'Stanley is neither hero nor exemplar of revolt'[50] seems like a gross understatement, whilst Christopher Innes' suggestion that the play depicts 'a victimized boarding-house population'[51] seems marred by its naïve melodramatic premise. In truth, as counterintuitive as it may originally sound, Pinter is actually undercutting the victim/victimiser dichotomy in his play. Not all critics, of

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[48] Pinter, qtd in Billington, p.78.
[49] Ann C. Hall, 'Looking for Mr. Goldberg: Spectacle and Speculation in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*', *Pinter Review* (1997), 48-56 (p.52).
[50] Pinter, 'Letter to Peter Wood', *Drama* (Winter 1981), pp.4-5 (p.5).
[51] Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.333.

course, have overlooked this crucial point: Katherine H. Burkman, for example, has recognised that the portrayal of Goldberg and McCann has too many ambiguous shadings for them to be classified as unadulterated 'villains':

> Pinter's characters reveal a curious ambiguity about their positions as victims. Stanley, in *The Birthday Party*, is victimized by two men who are themselves frightened, potential victims of the power they serve.[52]

This logic can be extended to Stanley himself, as it is undoubtedly the case that he is not only a victim, but a victimiser too: the intended rape, above all else, provides a graphic and unequivocal indictment of his exploitative character. Thus, Goldberg and McCann may indeed be socio-religious 'monsters', but Stanley's fragile and responsibility-denying individualism does not preclude the exploitation and victimisation of others.

In this section, I intend to offer a nuanced reading of the play that respects its psycho-political subtlety. To be precise, what I wish to argue is that the battle (in as much as it is a battle) is not simply between the forces of conformity and nonconformity, but rather between the two 'species' of anti-social tendency, namely the rigid, dogmatic traditionalist/conformist and the sullen, self-serving individualist. Viewed in this way, Stanley's victimisation and eventual conformity is still the central psycho-political theme, but what my reading emphasises is that the pianist's submission is caused by his unconsciously accrued guilt feelings. Indeed, using the insights of adaptive psychoanalysis, I intend to propose that the originary cause of Stanley's conformity is his acute existential death anxiety, as his symbolic quest to be

[52] Katherine Burkman, *The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter: Its Basis in Ritual* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971), p.21.

'death-defying' created a kind of guilt that could only be annulled through an annihilating embrace with an autocratic society.

I

In one of his recent works on clinical technique, the renegade psychoanalyst, Robert Langs, begins his presentation by proposing that a human being's most essential task in life is to adapt to his environment:

> Granted that there are basic needs for boundaries, nourishment, metabolism and excretion, nevertheless the most fundamental *task* for all living beings is that of *adapting to their environments*–a term used in its broadest sense to include living conditions, interactions with other living beings, natural events, and the state of our body organs and our inner feelings, fantasies, and other affects and processes.[53]

From a psychoanalytic point of view, Langs' emphasis on adaptation may seem innocuous at first, but, in reality, this straightforward, evolution-based premise has some profoundly disruptive implications for traditional psychoanalysis. According to Langs, if it is the case that our primary task is to adapt to environmental threats, then our mental life can no longer be described as primarily an inner war between the realistic conscious mind, and the pleasure-seeking unconscious; on the contrary, both regions– or, as he calls them, 'systems'–must be primarily orientated towards reality, otherwise we, as human organisms, would leave ourselves open to external threats. What is therefore foundation shaking about Langs' strongly adaptive approach is that he posits that the emotion-processing mind, otherwise known as the deep unconscious

[53] Robert Langs, *Fundamentals of Adaptive Psychotherapy and Counselling* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p.5.

system, is an organ of perception, as its *raison d'être* is to detect and then process environmental impingements that threaten the survival of the organism.[54]

On a basic level, Langs' revisionism appears to be either a revolutionary or transgressive reworking of Freud's topographic model of the mind, as he depicts the psyche, like his illustrious predecessor, as essentially divided into two distinct regions, but where these two analysts differ is that Langs argues that the division is based on two separate ways of processing environmental threats. For the theoretically-inclined reader, I imagine that Langs' theory immediately raises the following two pertinent questions: why is there a 'division of labour' in the mind, and how does the unconscious communicate its supposed 'perceptions'?

Dealing with the former first, Freud's topographical model proposed that the mind was inherently divided against itself, as the conscious mind is aligned with the organism's adaptation to reality, whilst the unconscious region seeks immediate gratification, without any concern about feasibility or danger. In Langs' case, he cannot, of course, offer a model couched in these precise terms, but this nevertheless does not prevent him from offering an opposing theory of mental conflict. More fully, for Langs, the inner conflict between the two 'systems' arises because our evolutionary progress dictated that human organisms should not be consciously burdened by events that trigger, on an emotional level, traumatic anxiety; this is because such events otherwise possess the pernicious ability to 'overload' one's conscious processing capacity, thereby blunting one's awareness of the more immediate threats posed by physical dangers.[55] For Langs, where conflict inevitably arises is that, although this arrangement seeks to serve our survival instinct, delegating traumatic material to the unconscious system implies that the conscious mind

[54] See Langs, p.6.
[55] See Langs, p.46.

maintains a high degree of denial about what is harmful, in an emotional sense, to the organism; in other words, inner conflict of the Langsian kind is even more epistemically based than its traditional counterpart, as the battle is not between pleasure and reality, but between denial and insight.

As for the second question, Langs believes that the unconscious system can and must communicate its perceptions, even if the conscious centre finds them both brutally frank and disturbingly apt; indeed, as I have just intimated, without some form of unconscious intervention, the denial-ridden conscious system would continue a path characterised by a form of 'blindness', as it would keep on overlooking the ways in which the environment, on a psychological level, is threatening. Thus, to help avoid repeating harmful behaviour, the unconscious system has the capacity to communicate its insights through a form of subterfuge, which Langsian theory calls encoded narratives.[56] Langs' fundamental postulation is therefore that the unconscious system relays its anxiety-provoking messages to the conscious system through narratives, as this circumnavigates the inner 'censor', whilst also allowing it to propose an adaptive response to the trauma-inducing triggering event, since stories detail the resolution of an initial psychical disruption. In the case of people who wish to choose insight over denial, Langs in his writings proposes that they must decode these narratives, and relate these bridging-themes back to the original external trigger. Only then can they begin to stop being the victim of their denial, as they would now understand how they have interpreted a traumatic occurrence.

Assuming that the unconscious is a communicative organ of perception, it may now be asked what kind of event this system processes. The superficial answer is traumatic events; the more accurate response is that the unconscious processes events

[56] See Langs, p.10.

that constitute a threat to the psychological integrity of the individual. The reason why this is so is actually quite simple: basically, the unconscious system is, like its counterpart, invested in ensuring survival, and, on a psychological level, this means that it is committed to detecting any environmental impingement that undermines the functioning of the self. In reality, what this amounts to is that, whilst the conscious system evolved to deal with the threat of physical death, the unconscious system came into being so that the individual could have a means to cope with various forms of death anxiety. According to Langs, there are three forms of death anxiety in particular, each of which is processed by the unconscious system, and each of which exacts its own toll on the organism as a whole.[57] Since this topic is of much relevance for my subsequent reading, it is worthwhile to examine each of these anxieties in some detail.

The first form of death anxiety is predatory death anxiety, which is experienced by the unconscious system when the individual is subjected to what is interpreted as a kind of 'assault' on the psyche, in the sense that deeply held ethical boundaries have been transgressed.[58] In this case, the conscious system may be vaguely aware of being persecuted, but, unlike the unconscious system, it will not register the most disturbing ramifications of the event. The reason for this division of labour is that Langs speculates that the unconscious system evolved, in part, to deal with the situation where there is a conflict between dependency and the admittance of injury. In Langs' view, human beings often find themselves mistreated by their caretakers, and yet, in the interests of survival, it is necessary to block from conscious awareness the full scale of the harm caused by the emotional abuse. In other words, this evolutionary mechanism prizes physical safety over emotional protection, which

[57] See Langs, p.49.
[58] See Langs, pp.88-89.

has the unfortunate consequence that it leads to a kind of denial that makes it likely that the individual will continue to be subjected to the same abuse.

The next related form of death anxiety is known as predation, which occurs when the unconscious system registers that the individual has violated some ethical boundary by committing a harmful act upon another person.[59] Guilt naturally ensues, but, as mentioned earlier, the conscious system cannot, in the interests of survival, be burdened too much by an awareness of wrongdoing, which is why recognition of one's culpability usually remains in the unconscious domain. Again, such an arrangement serves the interests of physical survival, but proves very costly in two notable ways. Firstly, an inability to recognise one's guilt perpetuates denial, which typically gives the perpetrator little chance of making any healing, reparative gestures. In such cases, where denial triumphs over insight, the individual is consigned to masochistic acts of self-punishment as his only means of trying to alleviate his guilt. Secondly, as Langs argues, predation death anxiety includes persecutory anxiety, as predation is typically interpreted by the unconscious mind as an act of murder, which renders, so it is believed, the perpetrator susceptible to being 'killed' by some revenge-seeking agent.[60] Consequently, those acutely burdened by predation anxiety will suffer from otherwise irrational fears of being harmed or murdered without knowing the actual origins of their terrors.

And the final, most fundamental form of death anxiety is of the existential kind. In essence, this can be characterised as a profound dread of non-being that arises from an acute awareness of what Langs terms as the following existential ground rule: whatever lives must, without exception, eventually die.[61] According to Langs, this awareness of the inevitability of personal demise cannot remain in the conscious

[59] See Langs, pp.89-90.
[60] See Langs, p.89.
[61] See Langs, pp.91-92.

domain too long, otherwise it would be obstructive to the organism's primary task of surviving and adapting; the unconscious mind is therefore the processor and repository of such awareness. Unsurprisingly, this act of denial still causes difficulties, though, because, if the existential death anxiety is particularly acute, the individual will repeatedly try to exempt himself from the fundamental existential law by attempting to become 'exceptional' in the sense of being 'beyond' rules or laws. For our purposes, one of the most important and reprehensible consequences of such denial is that the 'exceptional' individual must stand against the pro-social values of his society.

II

The Birthday Party opens with a seemingly pedestrian scene: an elderly couple, called Meg and Petey, are sitting at the breakfast table making small talk before Petey returns to his Sisyphean task of setting up deckchairs. Since this is a Pinter play, initial appearances prove to be deceptive, however, as this is no benign relationship: although their lives are characterised by dull routine, where the most noteworthy events are lived second-hand in Petey's newspaper, there is nevertheless a power inequality. In Meg's case, she craves, in an obviously child-like way, affection, as she tries, for example, to receive compliments by asking Petey if his cornflakes and fried bread were nice; likewise, she wants her husband to read out any interesting sections from the newspaper, as if he were some doting father that reads a bedtime story to her. Petey, in contrast, perceives his wife in somewhat more calculating terms, as he is mainly interested in Meg as a good housewife, who can be kept relatively content and useful if he mouths the required replies; in fact, for Petey, what he seems to value the most is being left alone to follow his own quiet pleasures, as it is painfully apparent that, if Meg remained silent, the newspaper would act as an unspoken barrier between

him and his wife. Pinter therefore shows in this opening scene that, for both parties, this relationship may seem mundane, but it is instead founded upon a varying degree of strategic manipulation of the other.

After this stage-setting scene, Pinter introduces a third, rather dishevelled, character, who descends from his bedroom to sit at the table for a belated breakfast. Strange as it may seem at first, what is readily apparent is that Stanley receives a kind of treatment not befitting his years, as Meg goads the young man to eat his cornflakes 'like a good boy'[62], whilst even Petey serves him his food. Such behaviour seems inexplicable only until we recall that shortly before Stanley Webber's entrance, the topic of Meg and Petey's childlessness was inadvertently raised by some remarks made about a birth notice:

> MEG: What is it?
>
> PETEY (*studying the newspaper*): Er–a girl.
>
> MEG: Not a boy?
>
> PETEY: No.
>
> MEG: Oh, what a shame. I'd be sorry. I'd much rather have a little boy.
>
> PETEY: A little girl's all right.
>
> MEG: I'd much rather have a little boy.
>
> *Pause*.
>
> PETEY: I've finished my cornflakes.[63]

As this excerpt implies, their lodger Stanley has been assigned, over time, a leading role in the couple's domestic 'games', as the void in Meg's married life has been

[62] Pinter, *The Birthday Party* (London: Faber, 1991), p.14.
[63] *Birthday Party*, p.11.

filled by loving, cherishing and protecting her 'little boy'; meanwhile, the retiring, yet calculating, Petey has been given space to follow his solitary pursuits. Stanley himself seems to have no great objection to these casting decisions, as the couple give him free board, allow him to sleep late, and, above all else, they permit him to avoid any kind of work. In short, Stanley is the couple's parasite of choice, as he lives off their spoils, giving nothing in return, except ungrateful remarks and unreasonable demands. The following altercation nicely characterises Stanley's manner:

> STANLEY: The milk's off.
>
> MEG: It's not. Petey ate his, didn't you Petey?
>
> PETEY: That's right.
>
> MEG: There you are then.
>
> STANLEY: All right, I'll go on to my second course.
>
> MEG: He hasn't finished his first course and he wants to go onto his second course?
>
> STANLEY: I feel like something cooked.
>
> MEG: Well, I'm not going to give it to you.
>
> PETEY: Give it to him.[64]

When Stanley wants something, he gets his own way, even if the couple have to split into separate factions. Quite evidently, their treatment has allowed Stanley to become like a petulant emperor, who holds sway over their dingy boarding house, as he knows nothing about responsibility; instead, he can only articulate his supposed 'entitlements'.

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[64] *Birthday Party*, p.15.

Stanley's autocratic and egocentric behaviour worsens once Petey leaves, as he starts to taunt Meg for being a bad wife, knowing that the old woman tries to be as agreeable as possible. Unfortunately, Meg is slow-witted, and cannot easily provide a cutting riposte to his slanderous comments; all she can do is tell him to 'mind your own business'.[65] It is only when Meg remarks that two visitors are intending to arrive that day that Stanley seems strangely perturbed and undermined: according to the stage directions, he '*slowly raises his head. He speaks without turning'*,[66] as if this unwelcome bit of news signifies a possibility too frightening to confront directly. In fact, Stanley quickly concludes that 'they won't come'[67] and it is 'a false alarm',[68] as he hopes that the boarding house's appalling record for visitors (over the last year, he has been the only guest) means that the two men have made some kind of mistake. Yet his anxiety suggests otherwise, as Stanley knows that he has quite tangible reasons to be upset, since his selfish and irresponsible behaviour may be tolerated, perhaps even encouraged by the Boles, but it would seem anti-social and unethical to third party onlookers. To the discerning theatregoer, Stanley comes across as someone on the run, who originally chose a good cover in this boarding house, only to then discover to his horror that he may indeed be found out. He is, without question, phobic about the prospect of outside scrutiny, as this might be the end to those domestic games that he has always won.

Stanley, in essence, seems like a frightened, defensive and selfish man, a man who has, for some yet undetermined reason, chosen to be exempted from life, as if he were an invalid. Meg's surprising bit of news about the visitors comes as a crushing blow, as he senses, with the bristle-raising keenness of an animal about to be attacked,

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[65] *Birthday Party*, p.16.
[66] *Birthday Party*, p.20.
[67] *Birthday Party*, p.21.
[68] *Birthday Party*, p.21.

that it is the beginning of the end of his tyrannous 'reign'. Sitting beside Meg at the breakfast table, all Stanley can do is articulate his broken dreams, as he tells a significant story about when he gave a concert at Lower Edmonton:

> …I once gave a concert.
>
> MEG: A concert?
>
> STANLEY (*reflectively*): Yes. It was a good one, too. They were there all there that night. Every single one of them. It was a great success. Yes. A concert. At Lower Edmonton.
>
> MEG: What did you wear?
>
> STANLEY (*to himself)*: I had a unique touch. Absolutely unique. They came up to me. They came up to me and said they were grateful. Champagne we had that night, the lot. (*Pause.*). My father nearly came down to hear me. Well, I dropped him a card anyway. But I don't think he could make it. No, I–I lost the address, that was it. (*Pause.*). Yes. Lower Edmonton. Then after that, you know what they did? They carved me up. Carved me up. It was all arranged, it was all worked out. My next concert. Somewhere else it was. In winter. I went down there to play. Then, when I got there, the hall was closed, the place was shuttered up, not even a caretaker. They'd locked it up…A fast one. They pulled a fast one. I'd like to know who was responsible for that. (*Bitterly.*). All right, Jack, I can take a tip. They want me to crawl down on my bended knees. Well I can take a tip…[69]

[69] *Birthday Party*, pp.22-23.

Through the fog of memory, denial and delusion, Stanley's faltering and cryptic tale constitutes some kind of response to the imminent arrival of the visitors. On a manifest level, Stanley's narrative is coated with a romantic sheen, as the narrative portrays a tragic case of the artist, the true individualist, refusing to kowtow to the generic demands of the marketplace, only to then find that his career as a concert pianist is brought to a premature end. Read this way, the two visitors can be understood as representatives of the anonymous 'they', a group that embodies, in the very fibre of their being, the insidious levelling tendencies of society. This romantic interpretation undoubtedly predicts that the visitors will be unmitigated villains.

Although this manifest story may indeed be seductive, and receive much support from subsequent events, it nevertheless fails to answer some nagging questions that undermine its overall credibility; for example, if Stanley was a man dedicated to his art, and to the expression of his 'unique touch', why did he take their cursory rejection as a 'carve up' that required him to flee into the stifling shelter of the Boles boarding house? Such a question cannot be convincingly answered within the framework of Stanley as primarily and essentially an artist fighting back the forces that want to compromise his 'unique touch'. Rather, if we construe Stanley Webber as a man that wants to be not so much an artist, but an exception to the common 'herd', then his phobic reaction to any 'imposition', commercial or otherwise, starts to make sense. For Stanley, it is external standards and laws that 'carve him up', as he perceives them, in a deeply unconscious way, as harbingers of death, since he unknowingly suffers from acute existential anxiety, which demands that he symbolically prove that he is, unlike his fellow human beings, exempt from the all-encompassing ground rule of life. According to this reading, his narrative is a reaction to the trauma-inducing trigger of hearing about the arrival of outside scrutiny, as it

details the original psychological ‘death’ that sent him hurling into the protective arms of Meg, and it foreshadows the end of his life as a little dictator, free from any social rules and responsibilities. Indeed, perhaps the most compelling support for this interpretation is that it explains Stanley’s exacerbated need for social recognition and his peculiar trajectory through life, as the defining feature of this need to prove one is exceptional is that it is dependent on the anonymous, generic and death-fated ‘They’ confirming the ‘intractable’ difference between you and them. Without them playing this game, it is impossible to remain in society as an exception, and the path of resignation and failure is adopted as one last attempt to achieve an ‘exemption note’. Stanley’s whole being therefore seems to be imprisoned in the following ‘logic’: better to be a reclusive ‘loser’ than a faceless servant to society.

The two emissaries of society are undoubtedly on their way, but just before they arrive, Pinter includes a short scene with the neighbour, Lulu, and Stanley. With Meg off to do some shopping, Lulu enters the living room, only to find the bedraggled, unshaven Stanley standing alone. Neither of them seems particularly familiar with each other, but this does not prevent Lulu assuming a direct and judgmental attitude towards Stanley. Over the course of this little scene, she subjects him to much criticism, mostly about his appearance (e.g., his unshaven, unwashed face, his wearing of glasses), as Lulu is simultaneously repelled and attracted to Stanley. What is even more significant (it is the main reason Lulu is introduced at this juncture) is that her criticisms gives an audience a further idea of why Stanley responds to others’ negative judgments so defensively. Although we already know that the concert organisers’ dismissal of him ‘carved him up’, his inertia and general self-contempt are not exclusively to do with his misbegotten need to be exceptional. A new element is introduced here, one that the audience might barely suspect, namely

Stanley's largely unconscious feelings of guilt. As Lulu taunts him for his appearance, and for getting 'under [Meg's] feet all day long',[70] Stanley neither argues nor criticises her back; his main strategy is to lie about his responsibilities, making out, for example, that he disinfected the house that morning. Coupled with this unpersuasive fakery is a general feeling of futility, as he remarks that there would be no point in him washing himself; furthermore, while he abruptly asks Lulu to run away with him, he remains rooted to the spot, unable to even accept her offer of a short walk. Viewed within the context of the overall action, Stanley's lying about his responsibilities, and his general lethargy, suggest that, on a conscious level, he disavows his wrongdoing, but, on an unconscious level, he knows that he is guilty of being a sponge, which is why he feels, over and above the literal meaning, 'unclean'. In fact, it seems that unconsciously and masochistically he awaits his imminent 'judgment day', where he will be 'cleansed' of the 'predation' guilt that comes from the hurt and strain that he has caused the Boles couple. Indeed, confirmation that this is so is that Stanley's acutely paranoiac reaction to the otherwise mundane announcement about two visitors arriving exposes his underlying fear of being murdered (or, in his own terms, 'carved up) for betraying, on a daily basis, the ethical boundaries associated with living in a society.

Lulu's departure is quickly followed by the arrival of Goldberg and McCann, society's 'pest control'. Sneaking in through the back door, the two men enter the unfamiliar territory of the living room with markedly different attitudes: McCann, the junior partner, is unsure that this is the right place, and seems tense and worried in general; Goldberg, in contrast, is certain they are where they should be, and he makes himself at home by settling into the armchair. At this point, Goldberg offers his

[70] *Birthday Party*, p.25.

anxious partner some advice, which quickly becomes a tribute to his own 'hallowed' past as an apprentice. It is worth quoting this section at length:

> The secret [to relaxation] is breathing. Take my tip. It's a well-known fact. Breathe in, breathe out, take a chance, let yourself go, what can you lose? Look at me. When I was an apprentice yet, McCann, every second Friday of the month my Uncle Barney used to take me to the seaside, regular as clockwork. Brighton, Canvey Island, Rottingdean– Uncle Barney wasn't particular. After lunch on Shabbuss we'd go and sit in a couple of deck chairs–you know, the ones with canopies–we'd have a little paddle, we'd watch the tide coming in, going out, the sun coming down-golden days, believe me, McCann. (*Reminiscent*.) Uncle Barney. Of course, he was an impeccable dresser. One of the old school. He had a house just outside Basingstoke at the time. Respected by the whole community. Culture? Don't talk to me about culture. He was an all-round man, what do you mean? He was a cosmopolitan […] You know one thing Uncle Barney taught me? Uncle Barney taught me that the word of a gentleman is enough. That's why, when I had to go away on business I never carried any money…Otherwise my name was good. Besides, I was a very busy man.[71]

Goldberg obviously likes to talk about his sentimentalised past, and to set himself up as an exemplary example of how to live the good life: 'The secret is breathing. Take my tip'. Apart from his businessman attire, this monologue indeed adds to the

[71] *Birthday Party*, pp.27-28.

impression that Goldberg is Stanley's alter ego, as his talk is laced with prescriptions, moral lessons, and sugary nostalgia; this is quite different to the former pianist's mirror-image story of fatherly rejection, crushing defeat, and perceived abandonment. Already the audience can see that, in many respects, Goldberg's life philosophy is a symptom of a man who wanted to achieve status through being perceived as unassailably right, and so he chose the strategy of identifying with paternal authority figures, such as his Uncle Barney; indeed, by becoming one of 'the old school' himself and adopting bourgeois cultural values, Goldberg feels that he is an 'all round man'. Such confidence may not, at first, seem foreboding, but it does in fact signal that this man in particular, with his authoritarian, closed-minded way of talking ('Culture? Don't talk to me about culture'.), and his over-emphasis on tradition, community and family solidarity, will find the self-centred individualist, Stanley, as someone needing to be 'reformed'. This is, of course, his mission.

In an earlier part of the play, Goldberg advises his tortured junior partner that this particular 'job' depends a great deal on the subject's 'attitude'.[72] When Goldberg and the 'subject' first meet, the former realises, quite quickly, that the reclusive lodger's attitude implies that he will not permit extended pleasantries: Stanley had previously tried to ingratiate himself with McCann, but now, after no success, he is prepared, like a cornered rat, to launch a counteroffensive. He tells the stranger that he finds him to be a 'dirty joke',[73] and he tries, with more than a hint of bravado, to act as the protector of the Boles couple:

> Let me–just make this clear. You don't bother me. To me, you're nothing but a dirty joke. But I have a responsibility towards the people in this house.

[72] *Birthday Party*, p.30.
[73] *Birthday Party*, p.45.

> They've been down here too long. They've lost their sense of smell. I haven't, and nobody's going to take advantage of them while I'm here. (*A little less forceful.)* Anyway, this house isn't your cup of tea. There's nothing here for you, from any angle, any angle. So why don't you just go, without any more fuss?[74]

Stanley's defiance is evidently couched in moral terms, but the whole speech is as if the pianist had struck a series of false notes. For the audience, it is almost impossible to believe that the spoilt and work-shy Stanley really cares about the Boles couple; instead, it is tempting to paraphrase his objection by saying 'nobody *else* is going to take advantage of them while I'm here'. Such cynicism seems justified, partly because Stanley cannot muster up any kind of sustained indignation, and partly because his most indirect strategy is based upon the assumption that Goldberg is as self-centred and as exploitative as he is: 'There's nothing here for you, from any angle, any angle'.

Unsurprisingly, Goldberg's initial reactions are markedly different. Unlike the surly tenant, he tries to remain cheerful and sociable, offering his effusive congratulations on Stanley's purported 'birthday'. Yet even for this embodiment of bonhomie, his projected attitude is undercut by his little tribute to the regenerative powers of 'rebirth':

> But a birthday, I always feel, is a great occasion, taken too much for granted these days. What a thing to celebrate–birth! Like getting up in the morning. Marvellous! Some people don't like the idea of getting up in the morning. I've heard them. Getting up in the morning, they say, what is it? Your skin's

[74] *Birthday Party*, p.45.

> crabby, you need a shave, your eyes are full of muck, your mouth is like a boghouse, the palms of your hands are full of sweat, your nose is clogged up, your feet stink, what are you but a corpse waiting to be washed? Whenever I hear that point of view I feel cheerful. Because I know what it is to wake up with the sun shining, to the sound of the lawnmower, all the little birds, the smell of the grass, church bells, tomato juice–[75]

Listening to this clichéd talk, an audience would find it difficult to overlook that this speech contains a veiled analogy, one that may be actually lost on both Goldberg and Stanley. Although Goldberg may marvel about mornings, his speech has a subtextual meaning, which suggests that he sees the lapsed pianist, with his unshaven face and unclean body, as a 'corpse waiting to be washed'. From the point of view of adaptive psychoanalysis, this strikingly macabre metaphor arises in this narrative like some malign ship on the horizon, foretelling not only Stanley's eventual death-in-life, but also, more urgently, Goldberg's unconscious perception that this individualist, with his separatist agenda, is like a dead man polluting the world of the living. Indeed, it seems that, for Goldberg, Stanley's very existence is inherently objectionable, as the staunch defender of tradition emerges from this initial encounter as a death-obsessed man, who hates and persecutes 'dissidents', as they arouse his unconscious fear of becoming like them, since he does not wish to be subject to their unenviable fate of being rendered as a scapegoat i.e., as an individualist who must be 'murdered' for his transgressions against society.

Goldberg finds it difficult to maintain his pleasant façade against Stanley's acrimony for too long, and so he decides, there and then, to fulfil the rather ominous

[75] *Birthday Party*, p.45.

obligations of his job: washing and resurrecting the ‘corpse’. Negotiating Stanley into a chair, both Goldberg and McCann start a process that is not so much an interrogation, but a verbal kicking ending in a character assassination. Their intention, it seems, is to hurl as many questions and accusations at Stanley as possible, so that the ‘carve up’ of their ‘subject’s’ psyche leads to inner reform. The conclusion to this episode nicely encapsulates their method:

> GOLDBERG: Which came first?
>
> MCCANN: Chicken? Egg? Which came first?
>
> GOLDBERG and MCCANN: Which came first? Which came first? Which came first?
>
> STANLEY *screams*.
>
> GOLDBERG: He doesn’t know. Do you know your own face?
>
> MCCANN: Wake him up. Stick a needle in his eye.
>
> GOLDBERG: You’re a plague, Webber. You’re an overthrow.
>
> MCCANN: You’re what’s left!
>
> GOLDBERG: But we’ve got the answer to you. We can sterilise you.
>
> MCCANN: What about Drogheda?
>
> GOLDBERG: Your bite is dead. Only your pong is left.
>
> MCCANN: You betrayed our land.
>
> GOLDBERG: You betray our breed.
>
> MCCANN: Who are you, Webber?
>
> GOLDBERG: What makes you think you exist?
>
> MCCANN: You’re dead.

> GOLDBERG: You're dead. You can't live, you can't think, you can't love. You're dead. You're a plague gone bad. There's no juice in you. You're nothing but an odour.[76]

The vindictiveness and the vitriol are indeed palpable during these quick-fire exchanges, as the earlier, more legitimate criticisms of Stanley (e.g., 'Why don't you pay the rent?'[77]) have receded into the background once the lodger became, for each emissary, the very face of nonconformity. In truth, this symbolic quality can be said to lend the verbal assault an almost darkly absurd quality, as it is unlikely that Stanley is, for example, both a betrayer of Ireland and of the Jewish race; similarly, it is decidedly implausible that Stanley was involved in the Siege of Drogheda in 1649. Nevertheless, from a psycho-political point of view, there is most definitely a rationale behind their accusations, as they are using Stanley as a sort of projective vessel to contain all of their own community-defying tendencies that they associate with death. From an audience's point of view, engaging in this scapegoating may seem like a warped exercise, but, according to their demented logic, their determination to 'wash' or 'sterilise' Stanley constitutes a kindly, reparative act, which will save them all. This is because their authoritarian mind-set dictates that, if all three of them are reborn in the life-body of the traditional, autocratic society, then they will no longer be 'infected' with the temptation to divorce themselves from the identity-giving sustenance that their rigid beliefs provide for them.

Goldberg and McCann may be the bearers of audacious hopes, but Stanley, in contrast, is an even more dejected figure at the end of this character assassination. Unlike his concert story, this particular 'carve up' began even before the celebrations,

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[76] *Birthday Party*, p.52.
[77] *Birthday Party*, p.51.

and it continues, with a grim remorselessness, until Stanley can barely take any more. Yet, in spite of Stanley protesting somewhat (most notably when he knees Goldberg in the groin), critics, such as Penelope Prentice, believe that Stanley actually invited this inquisition. This is how she puts it:

> Stanley's unfortunate choice to sit, a pivotal mistake assumes the form of *hamartia*, the classical mistake, the error in judgement which in Aristotle's *Poetics* is sometimes translated as 'flaw'. Trapped by his own decision to assume a subordinate position, Stanley steps over an invisible line that ushers in a brutal inquisition.[78]

Prentice no doubt has a point here, but, in my view, Stanley's assumption of the subordinate, sitting position is a 'faulty accomplishment', to use the Freudian term; in other words, Stanley does achieve his unconscious objective, no matter how much it might seem like a misguided conscious choice. Quoting the beginning of the inquisition should make this clear:

> GOLDBERG: Why are you wasting everybody's time, Webber? Why are you getting on everybody's wick? Why are you driving that old lady off her conk?
>
> MCCANN: He likes to do it!
>
> GOLDBERG: Why do you behave so badly, Webber? Why do you force that old man out to play chess?
>
> STANLEY: Me?

[78] Penelope Prentice, *Pinter: The Erotic Aesthetic* (New York: Garland, 2000), p.30.

> GOLDBERG: Why do you treat that young lady like a leper? She's not the leper, Webber![79]

Apart from the manic insistence on answers, the most curious quality about these criticisms is that Goldberg possesses an almost preternatural knowledge of Stanley's weak spots; for example, whilst it is true that Stanley avoided Lulu's invitations due to his acute social awkwardness, how could Goldberg, who has never met the young woman, possible know this? Perhaps a definitive answer must remain elusive, but one possibility, consistent with preceding events, is that the two emissaries are, in part, an externalisation of Stanley's own deep unconscious guilt. Such unacknowledged guilt is indeed plausible, as his earlier retelling of his concert story, coupled with his lying to Lulu about fulfilling his domestic responsibilities, show that Stanley is a man caught in the following double bind: he wants exemption from societal obligations, after being deemed 'unexceptional', but this only brings in its wake a sort of 'predation' guilt, as he knows, on an unconscious level, that his life is based upon exploitation. His sitting down is thus an unconsciously willed masochistic act, because he acutely feels that these representatives of society do actually have a legitimate 'debt' to collect.

Goldberg and McCann's relentless 'inquisition' of Stanley could have continued on, perhaps even verging into physical cruelty, but it is brought to a sudden end by Meg's appearance on the scene, complete with toy drum. Goldberg's finely honed social skills come into play at this point, as the transition to the actual birthday party proceedings is made with a minimum of awkwardness. Within a matter of minutes, Stanley has rather bizarrely moved from being persecuted to being

[79] *Birthday Party*, p.47.

celebrated, as Meg provides a loving, if naïve, tribute to her 'son', whilst the family-centric Goldberg pays homage to both this doting 'mother' and the birthday 'boy'. As for Stanley himself, he remains silent immediately after these speeches, and, more worryingly, for the rest of the evening. In this particular case, such silence no doubt 'speaks', as the audience is aware that they are watching a man who is trying to come to terms with a recent ordeal, which has left him with many raw emotions. There is indeed a palpable tension at this juncture in the play, as it is obvious that Stanley's silence is only some form of recuperative measure before he takes action.

Intriguingly, the former concert pianist never decides at his birthday party to blow the whistle on Goldberg and McCann. Instead, he just sits as if he were a passive victim of fate, remaining sullen whilst Goldberg looks longingly into the eyes of father-fixated Lulu, and Meg monologues to McCann about her childhood years. It is only when Meg suggests that they all play a game that Stanley starts to participate in the birthday 'celebrations', thereby revealing his underlying intentions. With the lights switched off, the game begins rather innocently, but it takes a macabre turn when Stanley, as the blindfolded player, tries to rape Lulu. Goldberg and McCann quickly come to the rescue:

> MCCANN *finds the torch on the floor, shines it on the table and* STANLEY. LULU *is lying spread-eagled on the table,* STANLEY *bent over her.* STANLEY, *as soon as the torchlight hits him, begins to giggle.* GOLDBERG *and* MCCANN *move toward him. He backs, giggling, the torch on his face. They follow him upstage, left. He backs against the hatch, giggling. The torch*

> *draws closer. His giggle rises and grows as he flattens himself against the wall. Their figures converge upon him.*[80]

Stanley's motives for these violent acts may seem both obscure and tragically misguided, as it should surely be the case that the targets would be Goldberg and McCann; after all, these two have been his persecutors. Stanley's actions still do make overall psychological sense, though, as his sexual aggression towards Lulu is, in part, an expression of Oedipal competitiveness, given that this rivalrous 'son' has tried to sleep with his 'father's' (i.e., Goldberg's) love interest; in fact, Stanley's demented glee can be understood as a sign that he achieved a near 'victory'. Nevertheless, this Oedipal act is only relevant in as far as it is Stanley's punishment of choice, as his masochistic longing for punishment has guided him, with an unfailing logic, to commit a transgression that would incite Goldberg's wrath and expiate his guilt. In other words, Stanley has willed the 'carve up' this time.

The next day could be described as the terrible aftermath of the party, as there are some ominous signs that Goldberg and McCann are hiding Stanley away from the others. For example, when Petey asks Goldberg about Stanley's health, the latter is uncharacteristically nervous and reticent, as he knows that the former concert pianist would seem like a broken man to any discerning individual. Yet one of the many ironies in the play is that it is when Stanley is at his most 'broken' and deflated that he is ready to re-join society; indeed, in Goldberg and McCann's view, the 'rebirth' of Stanley is an event worthy of celebration, which they mark with a rendition of the complimentary gifts that come with being 'integrated'. Here is a salient section from this promotional spiel:

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[80] *Birthday Party*, p.65.

GOLDBERG: We'll make a man of you.

MCCANN: And a woman.

GOLDBERG: You'll be re-orientated.

MCCANN: You'll be rich.

GOLDBERG: You'll be adjusted.

MCCANN: You'll be our pride and joy.

GOLDBERG: You'll be a mensch.

MCCANN: You'll be a success.

GOLDBERG: You'll be integrated.

MCCANN: You'll give orders.

GOLDBERG: You'll make decisions…[81]

With his clean-shaven face, dark suit and broken glasses, Stanley seems like a corpse that has been washed, so that he is ready to re-join the 'living' as a fellow faceless servant. More fully, for Stanley to accept such doctrines, he must have committed what is tantamount to an act of self-murder, as he is now even bereft of an individual 'voice'. This is painfully evident when Goldberg asks him what he thinks about his 'social contract':

GOLDBERG: Well, Stanny boy, what do you say, eh?

STANLEY: Ug–gughh… uh–gughhh…

MCCANN: What's your opinion, sir?

STANLEY: Caahhh… caahhh…[82]

[81] *Birthday Party*, pp.83-84.

Without a voice to argue back with, or glasses to 'see' his own truth, Stanley is now like his new mentor Goldberg, who always sat where he was told to sit. Indeed, at the play's conclusion, Pinter underscores Stanley's degree of subjection, his newfound readiness to be led, by having Petey cry out, 'Stan, don't let them tell you what to do'[83], whilst Goldberg and McCann usher him into their car. On this dispiriting note, the audience now knows that Stanley will, on the contrary, let 'them' tell him what to do for a very long time.

In conclusion, I believe that Stanley's act of self-murder is, without question, perturbing, but it was nevertheless fated, given his psychology. From a psycho-political perspective, the main virtue of this play is that Stanley's fate possesses a representative quality, as the dishevelled pianist embodies that tendency in human nature, which seeks exemption from responsibilities, either through exceptional talent or shameless trickery. More fully, as I have argued earlier, Stanley's neurotic ambition to realize his 'unique touch' was motivated by an existential death anxiety that compelled him to try and flee from the laws, regulations and responsibilities that constrain 'mere' mortals. However, as we have seen, this existential stance creates profound moral difficulties, as it incites much unconscious guilt, since the vain, self-serving individualist recognises on a subconscious level that 'exemption' requires the exploitation of others. Indeed, it is this guilt that fuels a countertrend to Stanley's faux individualism, because when it acquires enough force, his self-hatred drags him down to become like his conformist victimisers. Intriguingly enough, Pinter himself noted at one point that Stanley's essential problem was a lack of self-acceptance:

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[82] *Birthday Party*, p.84.
[83] *Birthday Party*, p.86.

> Stanley *cannot* perceive his only valid justification–which is he is what he is–therefore he certainly can never be articulate about it. He knows only to justify himself by dream, by pretence and by bluff, through fright. If he had cottoned on to the fact that he need only admit to himself what he actually is and is not, then Goldberg and McCann would not have paid their visit, or if they had, the same course of events would have by no means been assured.[84]

Although Pinter does not mention guilt in his brief commentary, he does nevertheless articulate the seeming paradox of Stanley's existence, namely that pretending to be 'more' than what he is, he ends up being 'less' than what he is. In this psycho-political play, then, it can be said that Pinter makes the provocative and somewhat paradoxical assertion that those who seek to flee from existential death anxiety (which authoritarianism, in particular, exacerbates[85]) by giving themselves over to worshipping a radically 'unique' self, nevertheless leave themselves open to the seductions of authoritarianism. As the case of Stanley Webber shows, a pseudo-individualist cannot provide any prolonged and sustained inner resistance to autocratic rule, as a fixation on exceptionality precludes the possibility of being an individual within a society, whilst the guilt induced by this existential stance acts like a vortex, sucking the person into the trap of inner assent. Overall, this rebounding 'process' is wonderfully exemplified by Stanley Webber, as he is a modern day Icarus, who, in seeking to fly above everyone else, finally decides to plummet and become 'Joe Soap'.

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[84] Pinter. 'Letter to Peter Wood'.

[85] Essentially, what I mean by this is that one of the implications of adaptive psychoanalysis is that authoritarian societies, with their excessive emphasis on strict rules and boundaries, may exacerbate a given individual's existential death anxiety.

One for the Road* and *Party Time

In the third act of *The Birthday Party*, the 'renowned' spokesman for tradition and the family finds himself at a loss for words:

> GOLDBERG: …And you'll find that what I say is true. Because I believe that the world….(*Vacant*)…Because I believe that the world…(*Desperate*)…BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT THE WORLD…(*Lost*)…[86]

Goldberg's sudden inability to articulate a coherent life philosophy cannot be put down as a merely personal failing; in reality, it is an inherent weakness, a fault-line in what can be termed the authoritarian mind-set, as those mired in an autocratic perspective have nothing but contempt for any form of reflective pursuit. In *One for the Road*, Nicholas perfectly captures this sentiment when he castigates his victim for his 'needless' thinking: 'He [a member of the party] didn't *think* like you shit bags. He *lived*'.[87]

One of the most important implications of this contemptuous attitude towards the authority-defying act of critical scrutiny is that the autocrat does not uphold his political stance due to it expressing, in his opinion, a coherent and cogent political philosophy. On the contrary, from a psycho-political perspective, it seduces the authoritarian personality, as it is an answer to his most insistent and tortuous needs.

In this section, I will offer readings of two plays (namely *One for the Road* and *Party Time*) in order to determine Pinter's own understanding of why the authoritarian individual needs to be bound to an autocratic regime. More specifically,

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[86] *Birthday Party*, p.78.
[87] Pinter, *One for the Road* in *Harold Pinter: Plays 4*, 2nd edn (London: Faber, 2005), p.240.

I will argue that Pinter suggests that the authoritarian is seduced by autocratic regimes, because, on an emotional and cognitive level, such societies, with their 'either/or' worldview, play into his phantasy of omnipotent control; furthermore, I will also propose that Pinter suggests that the autocrat suffers from a fragile body ego, which means that he seeks out 'hypermasculine', authoritarian societies, because they provide a much needed sense of boundaries, as they preclude, as much as possible, the terrifying threat of 'merger' with the despised other.

To support my readings of these plays, I will preface my close readings with two theoretical subsections denoted by 'A' and 'B'. Firstly, I will provide a brief discussion of some key Winnicottian theory, which helps to explain the essential features of the authoritarian's political 'style' i.e., his splitting of the world into the 'ideal' and the 'debased', and his futile quest for omnipotent control over his destiny. In the second sub-section, I will offer a very brief discussion of Mahler's notion of the symbiotic stage of development, as this idea can account for why the autocrat must erect a form of body armour to prevent any kind of merger with what is deemed as oppositional to the body politic.

I

(A)

It is indeed a truism that a psycho-political explanation of authoritarian societies is premised upon an examination of what could be termed the authoritarian personality, as it is this character type that is so insistently drawn to autocratic forms of government. In his book on psychosis and power, James M. Glass indeed offers such an explanation when he proposes that authoritarian political stances might be construed as an 'objective correlative' of the self's extreme regression:

> To understand the extremes of the political process, it may be necessary to examine the extremes of human regression and, even more important, to listen for the origins of those extremes in the self's intrapsychic history. Selves have histories just as nations do. It may therefore be useful to look for the motivating states and polities in the dynamics of psychological development and the vicissitudes of psychosis.[88]

Glass makes the provocative point that there is a correlation between political progress and emotional development, such that the authoritarian character is, in the psychological sense, still an infant. The reasoning behind Glass' position is that the autocratic individual exists in a state of suspended development, as he seeks sanctuary in outmoded, almost psychotic forms of thinking and of relating. Indeed, the psychodynamic view posits that the fundamental characteristic of the authoritarian individual is that he is a 'reality-denier', as he may not be psychotic *per se*, but, at the very least, there is a psychotic and regressive dimension to his personality.

Assuming that this psychodynamic view provides a cogent account of the psychology of authoritarianism, the following question may be asked: how does the autocratic self's 'regression' affect its style of thinking and relating? To answer this, at least provisionally, we must first consider the psychological mechanism known as projective identification (PI). In the following two excerpts, Kleinian commentators offer a succinct definition of the phenomenon before elaborating upon how PI actually serves as a defence mechanism:

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[88] James M. Glass, *Psychosis and Power: Threats to Democracy in the Self and the Group* (New York: Cornell, 1995), p.195.

> Projective identification is an unconscious phantasy in which aspects of the self or of an internal object are split off and attributed to an external object. The projected aspects may be felt by the projector to be either good or bad.[89]

> Projective identification has manifold aims: it may be directed towards the ideal object to avoid separation, or it may be directed towards the bad object to gain control of the source of danger. Various parts of the self may be projected, with varying aims: disowned parts of the self may be projected to avoid separation or keep them safe from bad things inside or to improve the external object through a kind of primitive projective reparation.[90]

The above descriptions suggest that PI determines the autocrat's being-in-the-world in three fundamental ways. Firstly, an individual, who uses the mechanism of PI does not try to resolve his inner conflicts in any kind of dialectical manner; instead, he externalises his purportedly 'good' and 'bad' aspects, as he transforms an inner battle into an outer conflict, where he can choose 'sides'. This explains why the autocrat desperately seeks 'salvation' through the resolution of schematic and partisan political conflicts. Secondly, and following on from this, the authoritarian character's use of PI means that he lives according to a dualistic worldview, as beliefs and people are categorised as either 'good' or 'bad'. It is this lamentable tendency to rigidly dichotomise that accounts for why the authoritarian character holds such inflexible and simplistic views. Finally, and perhaps most revealingly, an individual that uses the primitive mechanism of PI as their default position is condemned to a solipsistic existence, as they either identify with certain features or denigrate them, not realising,

[89] Elizabeth Bott Spillius, Jane Milton, Penelope Garvey, Cyril Couve and Deborah Steiner, *The New Dictionary of Kleinian Thought* (London: Routledge, 2011), p.102.
[90] Hannah Segal, *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein*, 5th edn (London: Karnac, 2008), pp.27-28.

of course, that they are their own traits. It is this misrecognition that lends a tragic dimension to the authoritarian's existence, because no matter how much he pretends that he belongs to a community of like minds, he is precluded from the fulfilments of true relatedness. Genuine relatedness, after all, requires the individual to acknowledge both similarity and difference, whereas the authoritarian's plight is that he only acknowledges the 'ideal' or the 'debased'.

The above discussion allows us to draw several important, albeit somewhat provisional, conclusions: the autocrat's dichotomous worldview finds authoritarian societies a plausible form of government, because they provide the illusion of certainty, and the perceived virtue that peace will reign when the enemy is 'taken out'. Nevertheless, there are deeper, more hidden motivations than these ones, which Glass makes reference to when he explains why the autocrat fails to engage in political dialogue:

> Psychosis or delusion precludes such meditations [i.e., an awareness of otherness, ambivalence and tolerance] because of the absolute, all-or-nothing quality of delusional projection and definition. To move, then, from the isolation of infancy and phantasies of omnipotence to 'being with' others is to find oneself in a political world, a world of mediation, compromise, otherness, relationship, mutuality, and so on.[91]

The telling phrase here is 'phantasies of omnipotence', as Glass implies that the authoritarian exists, existentially speaking, at a liminal stage, as he regresses to a state

[91] Glass, p.179.

of delusory omnipotent control, because the 'world of mediation' demands, so he thinks, a relinquishing of his power and a giving over to irresolvable uncertainty.

In order to understand better why the autocratic personality can oscillate between omnipotent power and profound impotence, and between righteous certitude and floundering doubt, it is helpful to examine some of Winnicott's theories concerning the initial stages of emotional development (i.e., the first six months of life). In the following passage, Winnicott describes how the mother's adaptation, when it is 'good enough', allows the infant to believe temporarily in its own 'omnipotence':

> In the first case the mother's adaptation is good enough and in consequence the infant begins to believe in external reality, which appears and behaves as by magic (because of the mother's relatively successful adaptation to the infant's gestures and needs), and which acts in a way that does not clash with the infant's omnipotence. On this basis the infant can gradually abrogate omnipotence. The True self has a spontaneity and this can be joined up with the world's events.[92]

Winnicott articulates quite a complex, almost paradoxical picture here, as he believes that, in order for the infant to have the existential nerve to abrogate omnipotence, he must be first convinced about his omnipotent control. In simpler terms, what Winnicott posits is that the young infant lives solely according to the pleasure principle, which means, in essence, that he must be sufficiently convinced that the world will dutifully obey his insistent callings; in fact, as Winnicott suggests, it is

[92] D.W. Winnicott, 'Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self' in *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, 7th edn (London: Karnac, 2007), pp.140-152 (p.146).

only when such demands are consistently met that the infant is willing to relinquish his omnipotent control, since he possesses enough faith in the world's reliability. Now, if such an abrogation indeed begins to take place, Winnicott calls this a move from 'object-relating' to 'object-use', which he believes is the decisive, and most difficult step in human development:

> In the sequence one can say that there is object-relating, then in the end there is object-use; in between, however, is the most difficult thing, perhaps, in human development; or the most irksome of all the early failures that come for mending. This thing that there is in between relating and use is the subject's placing of the object outside the area of the subject's omnipotent control; that is, the subject's perception of the object as an external phenomenon, not as a projective entity, in fact recognition of it as an entity in its own right.[93]

According to Winnicottian theory, the authoritarian personality is a casualty of 'insecure' omnipotence followed by a deep-seated angst about relinquishing control and acknowledging otherness. More fully, in his early life, the autocratic individual could not quite muster the existential conviction in his omnipotence, because when his mother, on occasion, did not arrive, he felt profoundly alone and powerless; this is why as an adult he is now susceptible to despairing impotence if he cannot attach himself to a secure 'object correlative' of his 'good' part i.e., an authoritarian system. Likewise, the authoritarian originally fled, as it were, from the 'cliff edge' of object-usage, because externalising the object meant only the admittance of defeat, as otherness, with its conspicuous independence, thwarted his control; it was indeed

[93] Winnicott, qtd in Steven B. Tuber's, *Attachment, Play, Authenticity: A Winnicottian Primer* (New York: Jason Aronson, 2008), p.93.

better, he unconsciously thought, to remain at the stage where everything is conceived as a mirror image of the self. In Winnicott's view, this attempt to domesticate otherness might be successful most of the time, but he suggests that the authoritarian personality never really forgets that traumatic 'fling' with the contingent, as he continually and desperately tries, in his adult life, to avoid the 'fall' from omnipotence and certitude that it brings in its wake.

(B)

In this sub-section, I wish to explore the nature of what could be termed the autocratic body ego, as this notion constitutes the central aspect of my analysis of *Party Time*. To begin the discussion: according to Freud, the self is no Cartesian soul, as it is fundamentally a corporeal form: 'the ego is first and foremost a body ego'.[94] He goes on to explain the connection as follows:

> The ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body.[95]

In terms of the autocratic personality, the type of body ego it possesses can be called a kind of body 'armour', as it is intended to create a rigid demarcation between the 'outer' and the 'inner'. One way of explaining why this is so is to consider the notion of hypermasculinity, which Michael Kimmel defines as a pathological accentuation of what a culture deems masculine:

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[94] Sigmund Freud, qtd in Edward W.L. Smith, *The Body in Psychotherapy* (North Carolina: McFarland and Company Inc., 1985), p.3.
[95] Freud, qtd in Smith, p.3.

> Although many beliefs or behaviours may be generally 'masculine' in appearance, the prefix 'hyper' implies a sense of extremes, and in so doing it suggests that what is 'hyper' masculine has become masculine in the wrong way. It is masculinity somehow out of control…Hypermasculinity always exists oppositionally in relation to forms of femininity (and, theoretically, hyperfemininity). What is hypermasculine, then, is always hyper-*not*-feminine.[96]

If femininity, as a construction, is typically construed as being both yielding and 'open', hypermasculinity, in contrast, is evidently both domineering and 'closed'. Indeed, providing that we accept Freud's thesis about psychophysical parallelism (i.e., that the mental sphere has a 'parallel' feature in the organic sphere), then the notion of 'hypermasculinity' accords well with what we would expect of an autocratic body ego, as the authoritarian's inflexible beliefs and his enforced separation from what is disowned are a mental projection of an 'armour' that maintains rigid, unyielding boundaries. In a very real sense, then, this account is merely a corporeal retelling of the Winnicottian theory presented earlier, as the fear of 'permeable' physical boundaries is analogous to the profound anxiety that comes from the power-hungry self opening itself up to otherness. In fact, the authoritarian's body is like his mind, as nothing deemed different from the self is allowed to 'penetrate'.

Nevertheless, although all of the above may indeed be the case (providing, of course, that we accept some of the postulates of classical Freudian theory), there is still the question of how this 'hypermasculine armour' originates, and what this 'armour' means in terms of concrete human relations. Whilst I have alluded to how

[96] Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), p.75.

this body armour might come into being according to Winnicottian theory, I find it more useful to contemplate the process in terms which were laid down by another object-relations theorist, namely Margaret Mahler. More fully, her notion of the symbiotic stage of development (a stage that concludes at five months of age) proposes that the originally unclear distinction between subject (baby) and object (mother) ends if the caregiver has provided enough empathic mirroring for the infant, as this mirroring strengthens the baby's sense of self on a mental and somatic level. Here are a few salient quotes from Mahler:

> All other conditions being equal, symbiosis was optimal when the mother naturally permitted the young infant to face her; that is, permitted and promoted eye contact.[97]
>
> The primary method of identity formation consists of mutual reflection during the symbiotic phase.[98]
>
> To be found by mother; to be seen by her (that is to say, to be mirrored by her) seems to build body awareness.[99]

What Mahler appears to be suggesting is that the baby's emotional and somatic life is made 'real' by the mother reflecting back what he feels, and it is this 'reflecting' that, for the first time, 'individuates' the baby. Indeed, whilst this individuation process is by no means over by the time that the symbiotic stage draws to a close, a successful negotiation of this phase means that self and other are beginning to be clearly differentiated.

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[97] Margaret Mahler, Fred Pine and Anni Bergman, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p.45.
[98] Mahler, pp.200.
[99] Mahler, pp.221-222.

Given this notion of 'symbiosis' it is therefore quite straightforward to provide one possible explanation for the formation of a hypermasculine armour. According to Mahler's theory, those individuals who need to erect a strong armour to clearly differentiate between self and other are those that never successfully negotiated the symbiotic stage. This has two main consequences. Firstly, there will be a pronounced fear of instinctual excitation, particularly of the sexual kind, as this requires a 'merger' between self and other in order for the instinct to be satisfied. The reason why this is so frightening is that there is a visceral fear of engulfment, as a fragile, non-individuated self, can easily become symbiotically intertwined with the object. Secondly, and related to the first point, such individuals require various kinds of 'buffers', as these buffers purportedly offer protection against a merger between self and other. The most notable kind of buffer, which will be discussed later, is a 'devivifying' one, as this is a means of keeping instinctual excitation to a minimum.

II

In his biography of Pinter, Michael Billington explains that *One for the Road* was written as a damning riposte to Turkish state oppression:

> It was also written in response to a very particular situation: Pinter's growing awareness of the systematic use of torture by the Turkish state and its oppression of writers, intellectuals, peace campaigners and racial minorities. Whereas in the past there had been a long gestation period between the image and its expression, in this case Pinter was driven to write the play in a state of controlled fury.[100]

[100] Billington, p.293.

Since Pinter is a psycho-political playwright, it is nevertheless to be expected that this work achieves a greater degree of generality than the specific situation, which motivated the writer to pen the play. Consequently, Charles Grimes' apt description of the play makes no mention of Turkey itself, but instead depicts it as a study of the autocratic personality:

> The play examines the relationship between individual psychology and power, exploring the notion of whether there is a type of personality attracted to positions of power and dominance. *One for the Road* also investigates the psychology of a torturer or leader who kills or sacrifices others for his ideals, country, group, or faith, posing the recurrent, but perhaps unanswerable, question of how such a person may reconcile murderous deeds with a positive self-image.[101]

Grimes describes this work as an attempt, in dramatic form, to explore a psychological 'illness', which manifests itself as an acute and worrying contradiction: an 'afflicted' individual holds the most stringent of ideals, yet commits the most reprehensible of acts. Of course, Pinter, quite astutely, recognised that there is no underlying contradiction: authoritarians construe murderous acts as a means of upholding their stringent ideals. As Pinter appreciated, the underlying question becomes this: what is the existential purpose of upholding these beliefs?

The play itself opens on a typically mordant note, as the first scene demonstrates how callously power can be wielded. A bruised and dejected rebel named Victor is ushered into the room of a state official named Nicholas, only to then

[101] Charles Grimes, *Harold Pinter's Politics: A Silence Beyond Echo* (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 2005), p.81.

be subjected to a rather bizarre exchange. After remarking that they are both 'civilised', Nicholas springs to his feet, and moves his fingers in front of the victim's eyes:

> What do you think this is? It's my finger. And this is my little finger. This is my big finger and this is my little finger. I wave my big finger in front of your eyes. Like this. And now I do the same with my little finger. I can also use both…at the same time. Like this. I can do anything I like. Do you think I am mad? My mother did. *He laughs*.[102]

Nicholas clearly enjoys, in his own twisted fashion, exercising great power over his victim, as he boasts, unlike a true civilised man, that his actions will face no opposition: 'I can do anything I like'. Already Pinter has established the fundamental irony of the authoritarian personality, as Nicholas depicts himself as a man that has achieved a high degree of moral integrity, when, in reality, he shows the true cost of a misguided integrity. Indeed, his conviction about his apparently unconditional power derives part of its sustenance from this malign integrity, because, with the support of the state itself, no violent act is ruled out for those that 'fail' to adhere to his ideals. In a sense, then, upholding justice is too easy for people like Nicholas, as there are no 'scales' of justice, determining the likelihood of being guilty or innocent.

Nicholas may vaunt his 'boundless' power, and he may have the state sanction his moral idiocy, but Pinter understood a key unwavering truth about such victimisers: they torture as a way of alleviating the pain of their own tortured selves. It is for this very reason that Nicholas *has* power over his victims, but he falls short of *being* a

[102] *One for the Road*, p.223.

powerful man, as his insidious need to always prove his 'power' suggests that, existentially speaking, he is walking on a tightrope poised above some maligned, yet unnamed, fate. For example, Nicholas must have his victim's attention, so that he can witness their fear and acquiescence. This is why he is obsessed with their eyes:

> Why am I so obsessed with eyes? Am I obsessed with eyes? Possibly. Not my eyes. Other people's eyes. The eyes of people who are brought to me here. They're so vulnerable. The soul shines through them.[103]

Nicholas' obsession with 'vulnerable' eyes is an excellent illustration of the authoritarian's use of the mechanism of projective identification, as he is unconsciously bound to that which lends a corporeal form to his own underlying 'weakness'. More fully, this explains both the potency and the danger of confronting his enemies because, on the one hand, PI allows him to attack, so it would seem, his vulnerability directly; this can lead to feelings of triumphant exultation. On the other hand, Nicholas can become bewitched, and therefore undermined, by looking into the mirror image of his own purported weakness. Of course, these tensions cannot be overall resolved as long as the authoritarian disowns and persecutes his 'bad' feelings, which is why Nicholas stoically continues his cruel behaviour, since he is condemned to act out set pieces in order to establish his contrived, and thus never fully credible, end.

After looking into those 'vulnerable' eyes, Nicholas himself starts to feels undermined, as Victor represents his underlying fears. Unsurprisingly, this discomfiting confrontation leads to a re-assertion of authority: 'Everyone respects me

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[103] *One for the Road*, p.224.

here. Including you? I think that is the correct stance'.[104] Rather courageously, Victor decides not to reply to this question, which then forces Nicholas to affirm his power by issuing an order:

> Stand up.
>
> VICTOR *stands*.
>
> Sit down.
>
> Victor *sits*.
>
> Thank you so much.[105]

Nicholas' petty display of authority does not, of course, convince him that he has won his victim's respect, as he has only been able to alter his enemy's physical position rather than his attitude. He now decides to change his strategy, as he tries to openly court approval:

> Tell me…one for the road I think… *He pours whisky.*
>
> You do respect me, I take it?
>
> *He stands in front of Victor and looks down at him. Victor looks up.*
>
> I would be right in assuming that?
>
> *Silence*.
>
> VICTOR: (*Quietly*) I don't know you.
>
> NICHOLAS: But you respect me.
>
> VICTOR: I don't know you.
>
> NICHOLAS: Are you saying you don't respect me?

[104] *One for the Road*, p.225.
[105] *One for the Road*, p.225.

Pause.

Would you like to know me better?

VICTOR: What I would like…has no bearing on the matter.

NICHOLAS: Oh yes it has.[106]

This seems to be a deeply ironic exchange, as it is perhaps counterintuitive that the victimiser would openly try to court the approval of the victim. Yet this neediness, if it can be called that, on the part of Nicholas signifies the fault-line in the authoritarian attitude: Nicholas needs to have his ideological role confirmed as being *absolutely* right, which means he is fated, again and again, to trying to win the assent of the dissenters. Nicholas himself knows that this proving that he has 'limitless' power is an arduous, almost impossible task, which is why he pours himself a drink, saying for the first time, 'one for the road'.[107] Indeed, he has to brace himself for the rocky road 'journey' ahead.

Despite Nicholas' pleas, Victor's unwavering silence proves, if proof were even needed, that he is never going to win his victim's respect. After a moment of acute frustration, the state official quickly decides that self-flattery should be the next strategy to console his flailing ego. Consequently, he chooses to laud over his victim the supposed benefits of being on his side of the ideological divide:

Who would you prefer to be? You or me?

Pause.

I'd go for me if I were you. The trouble about you, although I grant your merits, is that you're on a losing wicket, while I can't put a foot wrong. Do

[106] *One for the Road*, pp.226-227.
[107] *One for the Road*, p.227.

> you take my point? Ah God, let me confess, let me make a confession to you. I have never been more moved, in the whole of my life, as when- only the other day, last Friday, I believe–the man who runs the country announced to the country: we are all patriots, we are as one, we all share a common heritage. Except you, apparently.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> I feel a link, you see, a bond. I share a commonwealth of interest. I am not alone. I am not alone![108]

Nicholas' description of winning and losing political sides may seem more than a trifle cynical, but, in reality, it betrays how the authoritarian perceives his society: his government of choice does not so much represent him, as save him. In fact, as Nicholas' monologue implies, it is through a 'commonwealth of interest' that he can achieve 'omnipotent' control over events ('I can't put a foot wrong'), thereby keeping at bay the threat of impotence that comes from being alone, without anyone to guide him. In a subtle and innocuous way, then, what Pinter therefore intimates is that the fundamental source of Nicholas' angst is that, without some kind of stable political 'anchor', he is condemned to be forever blighted by paralyzing impotence and profound doubt. Eric Hoffer described this phenomenon when he wrote that, without a passionate, blind affirmation of a cause, the authoritarian personality only knows dejected isolation:

> The fanatic is perpetually incomplete and insecure. He cannot generate self-assurance out of his individual resources–out of his rejected self–but finds it

[108] *One for the Road*, p.232.

> only by clinging passionately to whatever support he happens to embrace. The passionate attachment is the essence of his blind devotion and religiosity, and he sees in it the source of all virtue and strength.[109]

As Hoffer argues, the autocratic personality lacks any intrinsic conviction in his capacities for reasoning, which is why he longs for any form of 'revelatory' guidance. In Nicholas' case, this longing is evidenced in his contempt for Victor's lack of 'certainty':

> You don't believe in a guiding light?
>
> *Pause.*
>
> What then?
>
> *Pause.*
>
> So…morally…you flounder in wet shit. You know…like when you've eaten a rancid omelette.[110]

This is a rather telling monologue, as Nicholas surmises that Victor's silence is due to him not possessing any starkly clear answers, and so he attributes to him what he feels when he is a bereft of a 'guiding light': 'so…morally…you flounder in wet shit'. What we have here, then, is Nicholas performing an act of unconscious ventriloquism, as the dissident becomes the mouthpiece for his own abject fear of being found, at any point, bereft of 'guidance'. Of course, what continually 'saves' Nicholas from this fate is that he has associated with the 'right' revelatory movement (as he puts it, 'God

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[109] Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), p.83.
[110] *One for the Road*, p.227.

speaks through me'[111]), which is why he passionately clings to authoritarian ideologies, as their communitarianism negates underlying isolation, and their moral absolutism supports phantasies of omnipotent control, since their schemas purportedly represent the world as it is.

At the conclusion of the play, Victor pleads for Nicholas to end his suffering by killing him. As one would expect, the state official expresses no sympathy for his plight, but instead admonishes him for giving into 'despair':

> I hate despair. I find it intolerable. The stink of it gets up my nose. It's a blemish. Despair, old fruit, is a cancer. It should be castrated. Indeed I've often found that that works.[112]

Since Nicholas clings to the illusion of omnipotent power, he is trapped in a world created by his own projections, which precludes any acknowledgement of Victor's sadness. All he can do instead is propose that this despair 'should be castrated', as his unconscious logic tells him that, after this decisive act, his own feelings of impotence need threaten him no more. Indeed, Nicholas praises death for this very reason, as he loves to kill others, and enforce a state of 'harmony':

> What about you? Do you want death? Not necessarily your own. Others'. The death of others. Do you love the death of others, or at any rate, do you love the death of others as much as I do? […]

[111] *One for the Road*, p.225.
[112] *One for the Road*, p.233.

> Death. Death. Death. Death. As has been noted by the most respected authorities, it is beautiful. The purest, harmonious thing there is. Sexual intercourse is nothing compared to it.[113]

Nicholas's remark that death is the 'purest, harmonious thing there is' may seem unintelligible at first, but it can be understood if one takes into account that the authoritarian seeks peace through the killing of others. According to the authoritarian mind-set, murder promises *inner* harmony, for the reason that his projected 'bad' self is also expected to meet its demise. In reality, no such harmony can ever be achieved in the autocratic soul, as the 'enemy' is never truly outside, but actually within.

Vindication that this is true comes at the end of the play when Nicholas orders the removal of Victor's tongue, so that he can 'kill' a dissenting voice. This is indeed a barbarous and cruel act, but it is ultimately, above all else, a despairing one: Nicholas evidently cannot afford to listen to the voice of dissent, as it would undermine the perilous equilibrium that he tries to maintain by living, in the ideological sense, at an Olympian height. Thus, as the curtain falls, the audience may come to understand that the authoritarian's conspicuous acts of violence are acts of despair, as Nicholas needs to desperately believe that harmony reigns when the opposition is silenced.

III

When *Party Time* premiered in October 1991, many London critics dismissed the play as only a minor work in the 'worn out' Pinter style. Charles Spencer, for example, remarked that 'it is all so glibly and glumly predictable that you feel like

[113] *One for the Road*, p.229.

screaming'.[114] Not all critics, though, were so damning or so patronising, as a few, like Irving Wardle, saw the play as a damning indictment of 'the reported iniquities of Africa and Latin America in the perspective of a London Pinter knows inside out'.[115] In terms of the present discussion, *Party Time* can indeed be construed as an implicit critique of specific Fascist governments. Still, Billington makes the commendable point that the work was composed in order to explore a more fundamental and general topic, namely authoritarian societies' 'moral myopia':

> Pinter is not literally suggesting that roadblocks are being set up in Holland Park or round-ups are taking place in Belgravia. What he does imply is that one of the preconditions of Fascism–a myopic and self-preoccupied wealthy elite, totally indifferent to the decisions taken in its name–is becoming dangerously apparent in Britain.[116]

Billington, in my view, is correct that *Party Time* is an examination of how the wealthy, right-wing elite order their moral universe, such that they can be complicit with state oppression. Yet, as much as Billington has identified a key theme of the play, I believe we must ask that cardinal question: what are the psychological characteristics that predispose an individual to uphold an absolutist moral code? Now, as the previous reading had demonstrated, Pinter has already offered a penetrating examination of the autocratic mind. What distinguishes *Party Time* from *One for the Road* is that Pinter depicts, in this play, the authoritarian as embodying a form of 'hypermasculinity'. In other words, in this work, Pinter takes seriously Freud's point

[114] Charles Spencer, qtd in Billington, p.330.
[115] Irving Wardle, qtd in Billington, p.331.
[116] Billington, p.331.

that the ego is, first and foremost, a body ego, and so he explores the connection between moral code, and gendered corporeal form.

Party Time begins with a scene that perfectly illustrates the privileged, hermetic world of the upper classes: whilst being waited upon by conscientious butlers at a dinner party, Terry tells his associate and host, Gavin White, about a club he joined recently, where you can play tennis, swim and even receive a hot towel as you drink by the pool. The only potential problem is that the club is 'naturally' an exclusive one:

> …But no, these towels I'm talking about are big bath towels, towels for the body, I'm just talking about pure comfort, that's why I'm telling you, the place has got real class, it's got everything. Mind you, there's a waiting list as long as–I mean you've got to be proposed and seconded, and then they've got to check you out, they don't let any old spare bugger in there, why should they?[117]

Although Essex-man 'heavy', Terry, is ostensibly discussing the nature of an exclusive health club with his boss, the discerning theatregoer can nevertheless note that the speech perfectly encapsulates the authoritarian mentality. As Terry intimates, a large part of the appeal is that one has to be chosen for membership, as its exclusivity means that the debased, and more importantly, the contingent is denied access: 'they don't let any spare bugger in there'. These sentiments, of course, accord well with the authoritarian personality's worldview, as this type of character can only survive, in the existential sense, if he feels both selected, and saved from the

[117] Pinter, *Party Time* in *Harold Pinter: Plays 4*, 2nd edn (London: Faber, 2005), p.283.

vicissitudes of fate. Dame Melissa echoes these sentiments when she later talks more openly about its 'virtues':

> But *our* club, *our* club–is a club which is activated, which is inspired by a moral sense, a moral awareness, a set of moral values which is–I have to say–unshakeable, rigorous, fundamental, constant.[118]

This speech may be, as far as political rigour goes, vacuously abstract, but it nevertheless expresses the viewpoint that provides solace to the autocrat, who divides his or her world according to the logic of projective identification. In the case of Dame Melissa, she, like the state terrorist, Nicholas, is empowered through her identification with an 'unshakeable' cause, and she decries the wider world for its moral relativism. It never occurs to Dame Melissa that her unyielding convictions are only symptomatic of her lust for certainty and for power.

Although the party talk continues on a self-congratulatory level, it is not long before Pinter exposes the partygoers' moral myopia. The first note of discord is struck when Terry's wife, Dusty, asks about the whereabouts of her brother, Jimmy:

> DUSTY: Did you hear what's happened to Jimmy? What's happened to Jimmy?
>
> TERRY: Nothing's happened.
>
> DUSTY: Nothing?

[118] *Party Time*, p.311.

> GAVIN: Nobody is discussing this. Nobody's discussing it, sweetie. Do you follow me? Nothing's happened to Jimmy. And if you're not a good girl I'll spank you.[119]

It is intimated in the play that the host, Gavin, is responsible for the roadblocks outside and for the policing, and so it is quite possible he has some answers. Rather disturbingly, however, he, like his henchman, Terry, does not so much deny Dusty's important question, as dismiss it as irrelevant. Evidently, the homosocial world of party politics dictates that political affiliations are more important than personal ties, as there is more than a hint of a suggestion that a wife's 'place' is not to ask bothersome questions: 'if you're not a good girl I'll spank you'. Such an impression is confirmed when Dusty says that her brother's absence is on her 'agenda', as Terry, in a patronising and misogynistic way, puts her in the picture:

> TERRY: What did you say?
>
> DUSTY: I said it's on my agenda.
>
> TERRY: No, no, you've got it wrong there, old darling. What you've got wrong there, old darling, what you've got totally wrong, is that you don't have any agenda. Got it? You have no agenda. Absolutely the opposite is the case. (*To the others*.) I'm going to have to give her a real talking to when I get her home, I can see that.
>
> GAVIN: So odd, the number of men who can't control their wives.
>
> TERRY: What?

[119] *Party Time*, p.284.

> GAVIN (*to* MELISSA): It's the root of many ills, you know. Uncontrollable wives.[120]

The rigid moralism of authoritarianism cannot descend to the level of the concrete or the personal, as its beliefs are not so much tested by reality, as imposed on the world. It is for this reason that certain women are deemed 'uncontrollable', as they enforce an 'agenda' based on ties of affection that counteract the austere indifference of the male autocrat. Somewhat typically, the authoritarian's frontline response to this threat is to distort reality so that it fits his worldview, which is why Terry nullifies the word 'agenda' so that his wife is denied her sense of moral agency. In fact, this is a covert attempt to blunt Dusty's nascent sense of moral discrimination, in the hope that she can remain as a narcissistic socialite, whose only 'onerous' duty is to write a cheque. Unsurprisingly, Dame Melissa epitomises the authoritarian's ideal woman, as she considers the sinister signs of state intervention as a mere 'trifle':

> The town's dead. There's nobody on the streets, there's not a soul in sight, apart from some…soldiers. My driver had to stop at a …you know…what do you call it? A roadblock. We had to say who we were…it really was a trifle…[121]

Given that 'uncontrollable wives' are 'the root of many ills', according to Gavin, it would seem that they serve no constructive purpose for the authoritarian male. As the play progresses, however, Pinter's offers a counterintuitive, insightful perspective on this matter, as he intimates that the authoritarian male enjoys

[120] *Party Time*, pp.296-297.
[121] *Party Time*, p.296.

triumphing over the sexually aroused female. This can be noted when Dusty somewhat teasingly asks Terry if her rebellious behaviour means she is going to be killed:

> TERRY: Yes, you're all going to die together, you and all your lot.
>
> DUSTY: How are you going to do it? Tell me.
>
> TERRY: Easy. We've got dozens of options. We could suffocate every single one of you at a given signal or we could shove a broomstick up each individual arse at another given signal or we could poison all the mother's milk in the world so that every baby would drop dead before it opened its perverted bloody mouth.
>
> DUSTY: But will it be fun for me? Will it be fun?
>
> TERRY: You'll love it. But I'm not going to tell you which method we'll use. I just want you to have a lot of sexual anticipation. I want you to look forward to whatever the means employed with a lot of sexual anticipation.[122]

This is one of the more unusual forms of sexual seduction, as both Terry and Dusty imagine the punishment for a political 'crime' as a sadomasochistic romp. Such a perverse view implies several things, both of which reveal a great deal about the authoritarian male. Firstly, the sexually aroused female represents for the authoritarian male his 'dirty', nonconformist side, for the reason that the sexual act is an intense form of merger; consequently, it constitutes a very threatening potential loss of boundaries, which implies, for the authoritarian, that they could be 'floundering in

[122] *Party Time*, p.302.

wet shit'[123], as dissenters apparently do. Thus, the sexual act, for the authoritarian male, must be construed as a form of violence, indeed as an attempt to phallically conquer that which threatens the dissolution of the self: 'we could shove a broomstick up each individual arse'.

Secondly, the above discussion implies that the autocrat possesses a rigid body ego (or what might be better termed a 'body armour'), as the act of merger is found to be so threatening to them. This would make sense, as the authoritarian must use the mechanism of projective identification, which separates the 'good' from the 'bad' by projecting the latter 'outside'. More fully, as a result of this unconscious manoeuvre, the authoritarian must reinforce his body ego boundary, lest he either comes in too close contact with that which represents the 'bad', or that which threatens the dissolution of the boundary due to excitation. Unsurprisingly, then, the authoritarian's body ego must assume a 'hypermasculine' form: 'hard' and 'unyielding'.

One of the ways in which this is achieved is intimated by the social critic, Klaus Theweleit, who argued that the authoritarian male pays tribute to the domestic female, because her moral 'unity' and calm exterior help bolster his body armour:

> She [the authoritarian's spouse] produces order in domestic space and functions as a barrier to ward off sexual danger; she is a subordinate and devivified buttress to the 'unity' of the soldier male. He might almost be said to use her as part of his body-armour.[124]

[123] *One for the Road*, p.227.
[124] Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror Vol.2*, trans. Stephen Conway (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p.223.

The domestic female poses no threat to the integrity of the body armour, as her maternal and wifely solicitude poses no threat of merger; furthermore, the supposed purity of her motives creates a sanitised domestic space that reinforces the body armour's demarcation of 'pure'= 'inside', and 'impure=outside'. Pinter himself alludes to this worshipping of a 'pure' domestic space when he has Terry sing Dusty's praises as a mother:

> But this girl here, this little girl here, do you know what she did? She looked after those twins all by herself! No maid, no help, nothing. She did it herself– all by herself. And when I got back from my travelling I would find the flat immaculate, the twins bathed and in bed, tucked up in bed, fast asleep, my wife looking beautiful and my dinner in the oven.[125]

While Pinter does not make any explicit reference to the authoritarian male's body armour, in an allusive fashion, he proposes that the autocratic male unconsciously conceives of his society as being analogous to strong body armour. This can be observed when Douglas and Fred talk about stopping the protests on the streets, as the former articulates the kind of peace that they envision:

> FRED: I admire people like you.
>
> DOUGLAS: So do I.
>
> FRED *clenches his fist.*

[125] *Party Time*, p.309.

FRED: A bit of that.

DOUGLAS *clenches his fist.*

DOUGLAS: A bit of that.

Pause.

FRED: How's it going tonight?

DOUGLAS: Like clockwork. Look. Let me tell you something. We want peace. We want peace and we're going to get it.

FRED: Quite right.

DOUGLAS: We want peace and we're going to get it. But we want that peace to be cast iron. No leaks. No draughts. Cast iron. Tight as a drum. That's the kind of peace we want and that's the kind of peace we're going to get. A cast iron peace.[126]

Douglas describes the kind of 'peaceful' society that they want as being similar to a cast iron container, as this is an expression of his party's unconscious need to possess a body ego that is also hard and unyielding. Pinter supports this interpretation when he has Charlotte compliment Fred on his fitness, as her use of the word 'regime' to describe his lean body implies that the authoritarian worldview is coupled with firm and tense body armour:

CHARLOTTE: God, your looks! No, seriously. You're still so handsome! How do you do it? What's your diet? What's your regime? What is your

[126] *Party Time*, p.292-293.

> regime by the way? What do you do to keep yourself so…I don't know…so…oh, I don't know…so trim, so fit?[127]

As these passages suggest, the authoritarian's being-in-the-world is a precarious one, as his body ego must be protected and reinforced, first and foremost, through identifying with the embodiments of his chosen ideology (e.g., his regime's uniform). The other, less obvious way is to dominate the sexually aroused female, as the authoritarian's dominance, his unwillingness to 'yield' to his partner, bolsters his existential conviction that he can confront the sexualised other, without giving into the terrifying threat of merger.

In conclusion, *Party Time*'s examination of gender roles in an authoritarian society conveyed Pinter's views on why these regimes can be characterized as hypermasculine, and how this hypermasculinity is maintained on a corporeal level. More fully, since the autocrat adheres to strict, uniform views, they must, on a bodily level, adopt physical forms that reinforce an unyielding difference between that which is ideologically supported, and that which is part of the self, but rejected through projection. Pinter intimates several ways that this rigid body ego is maintained. Firstly, the autocrat moves in 'select' circles, whether it be social clubs, parties, or indeed living arrangements that are separated from those 'bad' dissenters by the erection of firm boundaries, such as roadblocks. Secondly, the identification with a 'pure' domestic space helps to rigidly exclude whatever is deemed, in an ideological sense, as corrupting. In gender terms, what this implies is that women, in general, must play submissive roles in an autocratic society, as Pinter suggests that the domestic role requires a subservient wife, who constructs, at home, what the

[127] *Party Time*, p.307.

authoritarian demands for his own psychological integrity: an ordered world untainted by whatever is deemed morally unwholesome. Furthermore, the sexualised female must also submit to the autocratic male, because he has to control, as much as possible, the intensity of the sexual act, lest it leads to a dissolution of much-needed boundaries, and the existential predicament of losing the clear demarcations between the 'good' and the 'bad'.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the question of why Pinter believes that authoritarian ideologies can be so seductive for both the oppressors and the oppressed. In this concluding section, I wish to summarise Pinter's 'diagnostic', psycho-political understanding of the psychological 'illness' that supports and reinforces authoritarian political structures.

The Birthday Party explored how Stanley Webber's self-effacement (or, more precisely, his self-murder) was a cathartic release from his deeply entrenched guilt feelings, which were originally caused by his hubristic quest for 'exceptionality'. More fully, Pinter implied that Stanley's resultant submission did not arise from his deep-seated wish to vaunt the self through allegiance to tradition; on the contrary, his compliance was due to a rebound effect, as he, with his worshipping of his 'unique touch', had vaunted his own self too much. Generally speaking, then, what Pinter suggested is that authoritarian societies have the potential to seduce the guilt-ridden, responsibility-denying 'individualist', as their overemphasis on collectivism and duty promises a much-needed form of self-erasure that acts as a punishing corrective to his excessive worship of 'death-defying uniqueness'. What Pinter therefore proposed in this work is that the Stanley Webbers of this world are seduced by autocratic political structures because their submission is a guilt-expiating, masochistic act that replaces

one form of extremism with another. An alternative way of putting this is that *The Birthday Party* proposes, as its essential dramatic theme, that the punitive paternalism of authoritarian societies can be welcomed if the individual's unconscious moral 'centre' wishes the 'exceptional' individual to be thoroughly punished for his exploitation of others.

One for the Road is Pinter's in-depth exploration of what can be called the 'authoritarian personality'. In this work, Pinter is implicitly asking the question, 'Why are people like Nicholas so drawn to a barbarous and simplistic political ideology?' His answer, as detailed earlier, is quite complex and sophisticated, as it consists of two interdependent 'layers'. Firstly, Pinter suggests that the authoritarian individual is seduced by autocratic ideologies, as he is compelled, like the regime itself, to split the world into dichotomous factions (e.g., 'good' and evil; 'right' and 'wrong'; the 'saved' and the 'sinful fallen'). As Pinter intimates, such individuals have a split psyche, as they are driven to divide both the world and themselves according to the logic of projective identification; in other words, they project out their 'good' and 'bad' parts, which then leads them to identify with a regime that embodies the former, whilst persecuting a scapegoat that represents the latter. Of course, what they are conspicuously unable to do is tolerate ambivalence, as both their thoughts and their feelings are dominated by a metaphysics of 'either/or'. Such an extremist worldview has dire ethical consequences, as authoritarians, like Nicholas, can see nothing redemptive in their enemies, nor are they able to acknowledge their own human tendency to err.

Secondly, Pinter also provides, at least implicitly, an underlying reason for the autocrat's embracing of a dichotomous worldview: by means of his depiction of the state-sanctioned terrorist, Nicholas, he surmises that the authoritarian personality is

'reduced to becoming omnipotent'[128], as Wilfred Bion puts it. Indeed, like Winnicott, Pinter suggests that the autocratic individual is trapped at a regressive stage of emotional development where he cannot acknowledge 'otherness', as he can only either exult in an 'unassailable' sense of righteousness, or experience a terrifyingly lonely and humiliating loss of control that comes with a loss of contact with the world. This almost 'bi-polar' oscillation can be observed, for example, when Nicholas says he 'can't put a foot wrong',[129] which was a means of suppressing the underlying dreaded feelings of abject loneliness: 'I am not alone. I am not alone!'[130]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Pinter suggests that the daimonic drive of the authoritarian personality is for power and epistemic security, as he needs to believe that there is a 'non-contingent anchor' in the world that he can unwaveringly rely on, otherwise he plummets into a profoundly impotent and solipsistic state. In other words, this vacillation between unequivocal power and acute desolation is due to the authoritarian personality being unable to accept, or even recognise, that any realistic relationship to others is founded upon the acceptance of similarity and difference; all he knows instead is either all-embracing identification or dis-identification. Consequently, the authoritarian personality does not relate to people, but instead to signifiers of his own (dis)owned self; for example, in the play itself, Nicholas is unable to empathise with Victor's 'vulnerability' and 'despair', but sees them as grounds for excising his tongue. All in all, it is only someone who is so profoundly isolated and doubtful that wishes to hold such a sanitised world in so tight a grasp.

Party Time furthered Pinter's exploration of the authoritarian personality, as it highlighted what could be called the embodied dimension of their pathology.

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[128] Wilfrid Bion, qtd in James S. Grotstein's *A Beam of Intense Darkness: Wilfrid Bion's Legacy to Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac, 2007), p.33.
[129] *One for the Road*, p.223.
[130] *One for the Road*, p.223.

According to the playwright, the autocrat's body ego must make a clear demarcation between 'outside' and 'inside' (or, to put it another way, between the 'good' and the 'bad'), which means that he must support this 'border' by aligning himself with physical embodiments that offer a strong identity, otherwise he can easily find himself caught in a terrifying existential predicament that Mahler's theory describes i.e., a 'descent' into symbiotic engulfment with the other.

In terms of the play itself, Pinter suggests two ways in which this body ego is 'propped up' by an autocratic society and its ideology. Firstly, using allusive means, Pinter has two of his autocratic partygoers discuss the kind of 'peaceful' society that they envision, which is predicated upon it being 'No leaks. No draughts. Cast iron. Tight as a drum.'[131] What Pinter is drawing attention to here with these metaphors is that, just as the authoritarian personality needs strong epistemic boundaries, he also requires to erect a body armour that will neither 'leak' the goodness he has identified with, nor allow anything he disowns to 'blow' through. A good example of this is the setting of *Party Time*, as the room is in an exclusive area, which has been bordered off by the state police.

Secondly, by means of his depiction of the sexual politics of the play, Pinter shows that an authoritarian personality is drawn to autocratic regimes, as their gender divisions resonate with his 'hypermasculine' corporeality. More specifically, classifying women as either pure as snow wives or dangerous sluts serves the autocrat's purpose of being able to physically bond with something 'untainted', whilst phallically conquering that which threatens him with the dissolution of his identity. In both these cases, the autocrat is, with his hypermasculine emphasis, dominating women, as he either reduces them to acting as a shield, or he 'conquers' them so that

[131] *Party Time*, p.292.

he does not, through sexual excitement, lose his divisive orientation through merger. Overall, Pinter intimates that the misogynistic gender relationships further reinforce the ‘container’ which the autocrat inhabits.

Chapter 3: The Territorial Imperative: rooms as 'burrows'

Introduction

In a 1960 BBC interview, Pinter spoke candidly about what had gripped his imagination as a playwright, as he explained that what 'invited' him into his plays was a recurring image pregnant with meaning:

> Two people in a room–I am dealing a great deal of the time with this image of two people in a room. The curtain goes up on stage, and I see it as a very potent question: what is going to happen to these two people in a room?[132]

No one could disagree that the originary scenario of two people in a room does indeed raise many plot questions; Pinter nevertheless defines this scenario as raising a 'very potent question'. At another point in his interview, Pinter remarks upon his characters' relationship to their rooms, which sheds some light on the importance of the scenario, and why this governing image is believed to be so 'potent':

> [His characters are] scared of what is outside the room. We are all in this [situation], all in a room, and outside is the world…which is most inexplicable and frightening, curious and alarming.[133]

For Pinter, two people in a room is not merely a situation; on the contrary, it is an inherently dramatic predicament, as such characters are set against a world that can seem, at its worst, a frightening and overpowering adversary.

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[132] Pinter, interview with Kenneth Tynan, 28 October 1960, BBC Television.
[133] Pinter, interview with Tynan.

Although the basic meaning of the conflict of 'room against the world' is clear enough, one of the important questions in Pinter criticism is this: what is the thematic significance of this conflict? One answer is that this conflict between room and world represents, for Pinter, a tendency in human nature towards a paranoiac being-in-the-world. More fully, Pinter's characters are individuals so frightened by the indefinable world outside that they quickly ensconce themselves within the comforting familiar walls of their homes. Essentially, then, Pinter's characters embody a territorial imperative that is born out of fear of what lies beyond the consciously known and accepted; indeed, it is this fear that makes them prize safety too much, blunting their awareness of the fact that the seemingly protective walls could be instead the boundaries of a prison cell, where their frightened and stifled spirit is held hostage.

In this chapter, I wish to examine several ways in which Pinter has explored what could be called a pathological territorial imperative, as his insular characters are driven to make their homes into a compensatory world. Firstly, I will consider *A Slight Ache* (1958), as this play illustrates the consequences of the sustained use of the psychological mechanism of projection i.e., where the precarious 'boundaries' of the mind are maintained by displacing the 'dirt' of the psyche onto the outside world, beyond the confines of the home. As will become clear, the use of projection is the fundamental feature of the Pinteresque territorial imperative, as what Pinter's characters flee from is a world that mirrors their own anxieties, inadequacies, and sometimes their deepest, most unarticulated needs. More fully, in terms of *A Slight Ache*, I will argue, using the Freudian notion of the 'uncanny', that the imperative to carve out a homely, if somewhat castle-like, territory is due to the occupant defining their identity as though it were a piece of land to be protected from assailants; nevertheless, as Pinter's play shows, this defensive and reclusive way of being-in-the-

world can easily be punctured when a special kind of intruder (i.e., a 'familiar stranger') returns, and transforms the homely into the unhomely. Furthermore, once this more general point has been established, I intend to argue that the psycho-political significance of this play is that Pinter's invocation of the concept of projection helps one to understand better how class distinctions are supported and maintained.

Secondly, I will provide a reading of Pinter's first play, *The Room* (1957). What I intend to argue, using the Winnicottian notion of the holding space, is this: the territorial imperative can sometimes be an expression of an attempt to secure a facilitating, holding environment, where the dependent, nascent self can be nurtured in a world free of threat and filled with love; in other words, the territorial imperative can sometimes represent a need to 'incubate' the self in that most primordial of settings: home. Indeed, the Winnicottian notion of the holding space will be shown to be a useful way to explicate the psycho-political subtext of the play, as Winnicott's idea that the self must use the environment to not only incarnate itself in the body, but also to achieve adult independence, serves as a means to understand Pinter's contention that domestic servitude is a woman's desperate attempt to initiate a maturational process.

Finally, my reading of *The Caretaker* (1960) will propose that the play explores, quite strikingly, how our territories, our homes, can act as a phantasmal space that promises the deluded, frightened mind that the individual's need for love, security and esteem can be found in his room rather than in the supposedly hostile world outside. More fully, using the Winnicottian notion of transitional space, I intend to demonstrate that a compelling reading of this play is that all of the characters battle for territory, because each of them, in their own idiosyncratic way, wishes to make the

room into a pathological transitional space i.e., an actual room that nevertheless serves the individual's delusion that it satisfies some of his most basic needs.

After this reading of *The Caretaker* has been established, I will later show that the psycho-political significance of this work is that it dramatizes how in a capitalist society each individual is prone to treating the other in a utilitarian fashion, such that practically no-one is his brother's keeper; furthermore, I will also contend that the play demonstrates that in a society plagued by modest scarcity, those that are most victimised by the shortage retreat into a reclusive world, where their relational needs are satisfied by means of unnourishing and ultimately empty delusions.

A Slight Ache

I

In the previous chapter, projective identification was described as the principal psychological defence of the authoritarian personality. For the purposes of this section, I now want to explore the relationship between the psychological mechanism of projection, and the drive (or compulsion) to carve out a territory. Roy Schafer's definition is a helpful reminder of the main features of projection:

> Projection is a process by which an objectionable internal tendency [either an id impulse or superego attitude]…is unrealistically attributed to another person or to other objects in the environment instead of being recognised as part of one's self.[134]

Schafer's definition implies that the process of projection is used to create what can be called the 'territoriality of the self'. As David Bell highlights, projection involves a

[134] Roy Schafer, *Psychoanalytic Interpretation in Rorschach Testing* (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1954), p.279.

'psychic conflict being transformed into a spatial one'[135], as the individual externalises the disowned part, before dividing the world into two camps separated by so-called 'enemy' lines. In essence, this process of externalisation can be said to be a form of territorial imperative, as the beleaguered individual must erect a wall of defence against an enemy that purportedly exists 'over there'. Indeed, whether their territory is their home, neighbourhood or country, such separatist individuals are compelled by their paranoid temperament to create an ideological and physical divide that is built upon the foundations of blame and self-exculpation.

These kinds of individuals can be characterised, in one sense, as impostors, as their paranoiac logic creates a moral system that is driven by their self-serving, if largely unconscious, interests. Freud confirms this when he once famously remarked that paranoiac delusions are 'a caricature of a philosophical system'[136], as they reflect certain conceptual distinctions about the world, but those very rigid and dichotomous distinctions are founded upon untested and invariably specious premises. Consequently, their ethical beliefs are both self-serving and self-flattering, as they avoid confronting their own perceived weaknesses by blunting their self-awareness through indulging in giddy feelings of self-righteousness. In fact, they can easily become 'injustice collectors', because, in their own imposter-like way, they assume morals airs, but never consider their own culpability.

Given that the paranoiac lives, on a metaphorical and physical level, within circumscribed boundaries, it is to be expected that those who try to cross his threshold may possess the power to unsettle his very being. Such individuals can be termed 'familiar strangers', as their presence within the home unwittingly serves to re-introduce that unsettling, unfamiliar element, which had been previously been

[135] David Bell, *Paranoia: Ideas in Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 2003), p.5.
[136] Freud, qtd in Bell, p.9.

externalised and ‘expelled’. This rupture caused by ‘strange familiarity’ can be defined as the emergence of the ‘uncanny’, which Nicholas Royle describes as follows:

> The uncanny is not simply an experience of strangeness or alienation. More specifically, it is a commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar… It can consist in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home.[137]

In some respects, what Royle means by the ‘uncanny’ is the ‘return of the repressed’, as he implies that impulses or superego attitudes which have been disowned possess the power to disturb, in a radical fashion, the enforced homeliness that constitutes the ego; indeed, Freud himself remarks in his essay on ‘The Uncanny’ that it is not only the homely, but also the unhomely, that bears the trademark sign of being a familiar part of the individual’s identity, as repression can never transform the transgressive into the alien:

> The uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, buts something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.[138]

If the unhomely constitutes a kind of paradoxical form of familiarity (i.e., an almost assaultive recognition of a familiar strangeness), then the Freudian notion of home must be construed as a comforting fiction, which, like the ego itself, ensures a degree

[137] Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.1
[138] Sigmund Freud, ‘The Uncanny’ in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 17, trans. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 1999), p.241.

of psychological stability and equilibrium in a world that has the innate capacity to undermine its sometimes staid harmony. The French theorist, Gaston Bachelard, for example, concurs with this view, as his poetic description of what it means to be 'at-home' in the world emphasises that our homes are our origins, a monument of stability built out of the human need for some respite from the ever-changing and ever-threatening reality outside:

> In the life of man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human being's first world. Before he is 'cast into the world', as claimed by certain hasty metaphysics, man is laid in the cradle of the house. And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle. A concrete metaphysics cannot neglect this fact, this simple fact, all the more, since this fact is a value, an important value, to which we return in our daydreaming. Being is already a value. Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house.[139]

Assuming Bachelard's description to be true in an existential sense, the uncanny therefore has the potential to undermine an individual's psychological stability (or, in his terms, 'continuity'), as a 'familiar stranger', carrying the burden of his projections, can expose him to the disowned, much-maligned parts of his self when that stranger enters his private sanctum. In a very real sense, the 'unhomely', or the 'uncanny' is the shadow side of the paranoiac's territorial imperative, as a world that is based on

[139] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (London: Orion Press, 1964), pp.6-7.

the logic of a warring inner geography can never provide the individual with a secure sense of being 'at-home': those 'familiar strangers', embodying what has been banished from self-awareness, are always, psychically-speaking, standing on the threshold, threatening to intrude and transform the homely into the uncanny.

II

A Slight Ache begins with what could be called a slight misunderstanding: a middle-class couple, Edward and Flora, sit at the breakfast table, clarifying what flowers really are in their country estate garden:

> FLORA: Have you noticed the honeysuckle this morning?
>
> EDWARD: The what?
>
> FLORA: The honeysuckle.
>
> EDWARD: Honeysuckle? Where?
>
> FLORA: By the back gate Edward.
>
> EDWARD: Is that honeysuckle? I thought it was…convolvulus, or something.
>
> FLORA: But you know it's honeysuckle.
>
> EDWARD: I tell you I thought it was convolvulus.
>
> [*Pause*.][140]

Although Flora's opening conversational gambit is innocuous, perhaps even a little vacuous, Edward nevertheless struggles to answer her question about the honeysuckle, as he seems both confused and distracted. For Flora, this failure to recognise a flower that he should know is grounds for reproach, but, for the discerning audience member, who is familiar with Pinter's work, this offbeat occurrence is as

[140] Pinter, *A Slight Ache* in *Harold Pinter: Plays 1* (London: Faber, 1991), p.153.

portentous as the twitch of a trigger-finger: as the play progresses, the audience will come to appreciate that this mistake symbolises a more pernicious disorder of perception, as Edward, in his self-deceiving and paranoiac way, has a tendency to misrepresent certain things that he sees.

This impression is quickly confirmed when Edward is cautious about accepting his wife's offer to write outside, as he describes, for some reason, a sunny day as 'treacherous weather':

> EDWARD: The canopy? What for?
>
> FLORA: To shade you from the sun.
>
> EDWARD: Is there a breeze?
>
> FLORA: A light one.
>
> EDWARD: It's very treacherous weather, you know.
>
> [*Pause*]
>
> FLORA: Do you know what today is?
>
> EDWARD: Saturday.
>
> FLORA: It's the longest day of the year.
>
> EDWARD: Really?
>
> FLORA: It's the height of summer.[141]

If Flora's depiction is to be believed, then this is the height of summer, where the day promises to be long and sunny with no threatening clouds; quite evidently, this is a radically different portrayal to Edward's singular conviction that the weather is

[141] *A Slight Ache*, pp.154-155.

'treacherous'. Nevertheless, this puzzling inconsistency can be resolved by taking into account that Edward betrays the free-floating and pervasive mistrust that dogs the acute paranoiac, as his otherwise bizarre statement makes sense when it is construed as a symptom of his 'bunker' mentality, since his house is being treated as though it were a shelter from some wily and unpredictable enemy outside. What this suggests about Edward is that he is guilty of transposing his own inner moral climate onto the world, as his 'battle' against the elements is due to them bearing the imprint of his own untrustworthy and mercenary soul.

Edward's talk about the weather succinctly shows that the tangential need not be the inconsequential. Further evidence for this truth can be seen when a wasp disturbs the couple's breakfast tranquillity by invading the marmalade pot:

> EDWARD: Cover the pot. There's a wasp…Don't move. Keep still. What are you doing?
>
> FLORA: Covering the pot.
>
> EDWARD: Don't move. Leave it. Keep still. […]
>
> FLORA: It's going to the pot.
>
> EDWARD: Give me the lid.
>
> FLORA: It's in.
>
> EDWARD: Give me the lid.
>
> FLORA: I'll do it.
>
> EDWARD: Give it to me! Now….Slowly…
>
> FLORA: What are you doing?
>
> EDWARD: Be quiet. Slowly…carefully…on…the…pot! Ha-ha-ha. Very good.

He sits on a chair to the right of the table.

FLORA: Now he's in the marmalade.

EDWARD: Precisely.[142]

Edward–and Flora's– frightened reaction to the wasp is, without question, excessive, as they should know that wasps are not dangerous, even if they possess a sting. For the audience watching these comic antics, their behaviour seems more consistent with two people trying, in the dead of night, to ambush a burglar looting their possessions rather than entrapping a bothersome wasp. Still, the whole drawn out saga illustrates Edward's peculiar sensitivities, as he objects to the 'monster' that 'invades' his home for its own material gain. Accordingly, the punishment he doles out is cruel and vindictive:

EDWARD: Put it in the sink and drown it.

FLORA: It'll fly out and bite me.

EDWARD: It will not bite you! Wasps don't bite. Anyway, it won't fly out. It's stuck. It'll drown where it is, in the marmalade.

FLORA: What a horrible death.

EDWARD: On the contrary.

[*Pause*.]

FLORA: Have you got something in your eyes?

EDWARD: No. Why do you ask?

FLORA: You keep clenching them, blinking them.

[142] *A Slight Ache*, p.155.

EDWARD: I have a slight ache in them.[143]

|

|

EDWARD: Ah, yes. Tilt the pot. Tilt. Aah…down here…right down…blinding him…that's…it.

FLORA: Is it?

EDWARD: Lift the lid. All right, I will. There he is! Dead. What a monster. [*He squashes it on a plate*]

FLORA: What an awful experience.

EDWARD: What a beautiful day it is. Beautiful. I think I shall work in the garden this morning. Where's that canopy?[144]

To kill a wasp is, of course, no crime, but it is significant and somewhat disturbing that what gives Edward peace of mind (at least temporarily) is ambushing and killing a perceived enemy that embodies his own impulsive and exploitative nature. Quite obviously, this sadistic act is a form of remedial therapy for a man that construes parts of the external world as personifications, yet what he tragically misperceives is that he can destroy the player, but never, in this way, the role. His 'slight ache' in his eyes is indeed a testament to this disorder of perception, this excessive squinting that turns the world into a personal drama, with Edward as the main persecuted character.

If the wasp was 'monstrous', as Edward would have it, it had at least the virtue that it could be easily dispensed with. However, not all 'pests' are so straightforward to deal with, as one in particular has been the bane of Edward's existence for several

[143] *A Slight Ache*, p.156.
[144] *A Slight Ache*, p.158.

months now. We, the audience, first learn about this 'monster' in the guise of an old blind matchseller when Edward bitterly complains to Flora about the human blot on the landscape:

> It used to give me great pleasure, such pleasure, to stroll along the long grass, out through the back gate, pass into the lane. That pleasure is now denied me. It's my own house, isn't it? It's my own gate.[145]

Edward reveals his petulant and self-pitying character here, as he assumes, like the paranoiac does, that the old man is not simply standing at the gate, but wilfully obstructing his path. This is because his persecutory mentality is all too willing to conflate frustrations with malign intentions, which means that he, with his 'slight ache', overlooks a very basic fact: the old man may be standing beside the gate, but he is on a public footpath. Edward, of course, distorts this picture, as he construes the matchseller in the same way as the wasp, since both are perceived as trying to encroach on his territory.

Edward's fear, as we have seen, was excessive in dealing with the wasp, and it seems an even more pathological reaction to a presumably harmless old man. Yet his persistent fear of the matchseller is logical, in a sense, as the old man's human form has a greater potential to be used as an embodiment of Edward's multifaceted and ensnaring anxieties. One of these is Edward's fear of the exploited lower class, which is evoked by the decrepit and plebeian matchseller, as Augusta Walker explains:

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[145] *A Slight Ache*, p.159-160.

> In contrast to [Edward and Flora], he appears the most miserable of living things. He seems blind, deaf, dumb, and barely able to move. He's at the bottom of the human scale. He is that part of the race that has been squeezed dry to produce these glittering aristocrats, his superiors, and he has taken up his post at their gate as if he were a spectre of his class, their discarded refuse, come to haunt them.[146]

Certainly, Walker's reading of the matchseller would explain why Edward might fear the old man, as capitalist exploitation, according to socialism, is an unfair hoarding of wealth, a form of stealing that makes the rich jealously guard their money against any so-called working-class looters. Edward's comments at the scullery window about the 'absurdity' and 'falsity' of the matchseller's existence seem to confirm further Walker's view that the old man is a guilty reminder of class exploitation, as Edward cannot stand to witness what happens when someone fails to be a success:

> It's quite absurd, of course. I really can't tolerate something so…absurd, right on my doorstep. I shall not tolerate it. He's sold nothing all morning. No one passed. Yes. A monk passed. A non-smoker. In a loose garment. It's quite obvious he was a non-smoker but still, the man made no effort. He made no effort to clinch a sale, to rid himself of one of his cursed boxes. His one chance, all morning, and he made no effort.
>
> [*Pause*.]
>
> I haven't wasted my time. I've hit, in fact, upon the truth. He's not a matchseller at all. The bastard isn't a matchseller at all. Curious I never

[146] Augusta Walker, 'Messages from Pinter', *Modern Drama* 10 (1967), 1-10 (p.7).

> realized that before. He's an impostor…how ridiculous to go on calling him by that title [of matchseller]. What a farce. No, there is something very false about that man. I intend to get to the bottom of it.[147]

On one level, as Walker intimates, Edward feels deeply uncomfortable watching the matchseller try and earn a living long after his capacity to work, while he, in his retirement, languishes on his country estate; even for blinkered Edward, such exploitation is hard to ignore. On a deeper level, though, what makes Edward even more unnerved is that there is a symbolic affinity between the two men, as the matchseller is a 'familiar stranger', who represents the lay scholar's fear of being cursed with the irredeemable mark of failure by his superego. It is for this reason that Edward feels so acutely frustrated over the old man failing to sell even one of his 'cursed' matchboxes, as Edward has lived a life that constitutes a flight from failure, since failure, in a capitalist society, means the death of the self that constitutes one's identity i.e., the enterprising self. Overall, the old man embodies that acculturated fear of 'nothingness', which Jules Henry describes below:

> The possibility of becoming nothing appears in dreams of failure, as being lost, crushed, or put in prison. In dreams each single fear is a concentration of a multitude; hence the power of dreams to urge us on–out of one fear into another. It is the destiny of all fearful things to escape from one fear, merely for to have it rise as a new one from behind the next rock. But the fear of nothingness is the basic one–the pattern, the mould, and the matrix–from

[147] *A Slight Ache*, pp.162-163.

> which all others issue. Why argue about 'man's fear of death'? Whether or not we fear death, what we encounter in our dreams is a polymorphous fear, which presents itself now as death, now as failure, now as being lost, caught in the act, or as imprisonment for nameless crimes. There are therefore many fears that are not of death, but only one fear of death. The fears of non-death, the historically generated fears, are the basic question.[148]

The matchseller acts as one big arrowhead pointing towards nothingness, as his chronically impaired hearing and eyesight, coupled with his age, signifies physical dissolution and impending extinction; furthermore, as Henry might argue, he also represents the 'historically-generated' anxiety about failure, as the old man is a 'loser', who is devoted to the Sisyphean task of perpetually returning to sell his wares. Facing the embodiment of such a grim outcome, it is small wonder that Edward comes to the conclusion that the man must be an 'impostor', as he tries to convince himself that a worker cannot possibly do what he is not good at. Yet the quickness to label and to deride betrays Edward's uneasiness, as he knows on some unarticulated level that, if success is the ultimate arbiter of authenticity, he himself is also an impostor, since his scholarly articles, languishing unread in scullery drawers, are not dissimilar to the unwanted, accursed matchboxes.

After several months of being 'plagued' by the matchseller, Edward has now come to a grim and yet inevitable conclusion: the old man is not going to budge unless he himself takes action. With this in mind, he gets Flora to invite the old man inside, which may seem to be a curious plan until we recall what had happened to the

[148] Jules Henry, *Pathways to Madness* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), p. 145.

wasp in the marmalade pot. Indeed, like all paranoiacs, Edward's fear is enlivened by his hatred and vindictiveness, which means that his offer must be construed as a form of entrapment, an attempt to conquer him by subjecting him to Edward's cultural power. It is not without significance that the first thing Edward tells the matchseller to do is take a seat, as he wants the old man to assume a submissive position:

> Now, now, you mustn't…stand about like that. Take a seat. Which one would you prefer? We have a great variety as you see. Can't stand uniformity. Like different seats, different backs. Often when I'm working, you know, I draw up one chair, scribble a few lines, put it by, draw up another, sit back, ponder, put it by…[149]

Meeting in the study is part of Edward's plan, as he has chosen a setting that is designed to convey the weight of his learning, and reinforce the impression to the matchseller, and to himself, of how different he is, as a middle-class man, from the old salesman. This plan never comes to fruition, however, not even from the beginning, as Edward is neither able to get the matchseller to talk, nor can he even negotiate him into the submissive position of sitting down. Instead, his middle-class politeness must fill the vacuum between intent and accomplishment, and so he starts to monologue about his essayistic attempts:

> Now and again I jot down a few observations on certain tropical phenomena– not from the same standpoint, of course. [*Silent pause*] Yes, Africa, now. Africa's always been my happy hunting ground. Fascinating country. Do you

[149] *A Slight Ache*, p.167.

> know it? I get the impression that you've been around a bit. Do you by any chance know the Membunza Mountains? Great range south of Katambaloo…[150]

What the setting failed to do, Edward tries to do with words, as this chitchat about Africa is an attempt to distance himself from the matchseller by reminding himself that he has visited, and above all else, 'triumphed' in exotic places that the old working-class man could never be acquainted with, let alone journey to. What Edward therefore inadvertently reveals is that he is more of a materialist than his scholarly persona would otherwise admit, as the phrase 'happy hunting ground' encapsulates that he has a plundering, acquisitive mentality. This provides further confirmation, if any were needed, that Edward has lived his life as an impostor, who must now, in facing the embodiment of his fears, deny his ineffectuality by hearkening back to past 'conquests'. Clearly, his study will be, in spite of his intentions, no happy hunting ground.

Edward's pompous talk about the exotic fizzles out rather quickly, as even he is aware that this topic is hardly going to get the matchseller to start talking. He tries instead to strike up a rapport by talking about his own difficult times in 'commerce':

> Yes, I…I was in much the same position myself then as you are now, you understand. Struggling to make my way in the world. I was in commerce too…Oh yes, I know what it's like–the weather, the rain, beaten from pillar to post, uphill and down dale…the rewards were few…winters in hovels…up till all hours working at your thesis…yes, I've done it all. Let me advise

[150] *A Slight Ache*, p.167.

> you…Never mind what the world says. Keep at it. Keep your shoulder to the wheel. It'll pay dividends.[151]

In this 'how-to-succeed-in-business' spiel, Edward may have conceded that he was once in the same position as the matchseller, but his pompous reference to selling as 'commerce', and his self-congratulatory talk of having 'done it all', suggest that he is only erecting another barrier, so to speak, between them. In fact, his clichéd advice about the virtue of 'persistence' serves a defensive function, as it is an attempt to conceal a very fundamental fact: this crippled, old man cannot keep 'his shoulder to the wheel', waiting for success to come along, as he represents the forces of death and decay. Edward's psychological defence is indeed a fragile and rather ineffective strategy, as it involves denying what is otherwise most obvious.

In the final phase of the play, Pinter orchestrates the undoing of Edward's psychological defences, as he comes to acknowledge that the matchseller embodies a painful and frightening truth about himself. Pinter depicts this process when the old man suddenly drops his tray of shoddy wares, which compels Edward to pick them up:

> Eh, these boxes are all wet. You've no right to sell wet matches, you know. Uuuuugggh. This feels suspiciously like fungus. You won't get very far in this trade if you don't take care of your goods. [*Grunts, rising*.] Well, here you are.[152]

[151] *A Slight Ache*, p.68.
[152] *A Slight Ache*, p.170.

When Edward earlier described the matchboxes as 'cursed' he could not have realised how apt his expression was, as the soggy matches, like the old man himself, are useless as far the capitalist system is concerned; quite evidently, the fungus on the boxes, with its pervasive decay, disgusts Edward, as it intimates to him that failure is death. Infected with this mood of futility, Edward feels that he must at least do something in order to prove that he is capable of purposeful action, and so, for the first time in the play, he adopts an aggressive stance by trying to push the old man into the corner. Nevertheless, Edward is unable to dominate his own space as a predator would, as he is, at root, too frightened by the matchseller, which is why he is happy to allow the old man to take a seat:

> Aaah! You're sat. At last. What a relief. You must be tired. [*Slight Pause*.] Chair comfortable? I bought it in a sale. The same sale. When I was a young man. You too, perhaps. You too, perhaps.
>
> [*Pause*.]
>
> At the same time, perhaps!
>
> [*Pause*.]
>
> [*Muttering*.] I must get some air. I must get a breath of air.[153]

Edward's relief at seeing the old man sit down is reminiscent of his pleasure at witnessing the 'monstrous' wasp being pinned down in the marmalade jar, as he no doubt hopes that he can now re-assert his dominance over his study, given that to be seated is to submit to the role of guest. Yet what Edward does not realise is that it is

[153] *A Slight Ache*, p.171.

he who is now 'in' the marmalade pot, because when he invited this 'familiar stranger' over his threshold, he was inviting back his own repressed and projected feelings of inauthenticity and of futility. Consequently, now that he has him up close and sitting down, the repressed asserts itself with an inexorable force, as thoughts of being 'in much of the same position' lead onto a strangely powerful disclosure: Edward and the old man may have crossed paths when he bought chairs in a sale. This realization is so appalling for Edward to even contemplate that he starts gasping for air, as it touches upon, in a somewhat covert way, two of his main anxieties. Firstly, his underlying guilt over his class exploitation is exposed, as part of what horrifies him is that they may have started at the same level in life, but now he has come to 'own' poor, unfortunate souls like the matchseller; it is for this reason he talks as though the old man was bought along with the chair: 'I bought it in a sale. The same sale. When I was a young man. You too, perhaps. You too, perhaps.'

Secondly, what horrifies Edward even more is the anguished recognition that he shares with the matchseller a common present as well as a common past: the lay scholar, who writes about the 'dimensionality and continuity of space… and time'[154] yet somewhat discouragingly identifies Africa as a country, peddles academic wares that are about as useful and as needed as soggy matches. Edward, of course, does not articulate this, but it is still the case that he and the matchseller are kindred spirits, as both are failures due to their marked unsuitability for their roles. Unsurprisingly, such a realization is not freeing, as Edward finds it a 'suffocating', life-negating truth, which suddenly submerges him in a deep sea of futility.

Edward leaves the house for the first time in the play, only to return once his wife has had her chance to mollycoddle the matchseller. On this occasion, Edward's

[154] *A Slight Ache*, p.161.

manner of speaking is much more resigned than before, as if he has accepted, like a dying Empire, that it is only nostalgia that can now assuage his flailing ego:

> The garden, too, [yesterday] was sharp, lucid, in the rain, in the sun.
>
> [*Pause*.]
>
> My den, too, was sharp, arranged for my purpose….
>
> [*Pause*.]
>
> The house, too, was polished, all the banisters were polished, and the stair rods, and the curtain rods.
>
> [*Pause*.]
>
> My desk was polished, and my cabinet.
>
> [*Pause*.]
>
> I was polished. [*Nostalgic*.] I could stand on the hill and look through my telescope at the sea. And follow the path of the three-masted schooner, feeling fit, aware of my sinews, their suppleness, my arms lifted holding the telescope, steady, easily, no trembling, my aim was perfect…my grasp firm, my command established, my life was accounted for, I was ready for my excursions to the cliff, down the path to the back gate, through the long grass, no need to watch for the nettles, my progress was fluent, after my long struggling against all kinds of usurpers, disresputables, lists, literally lists of people anxious to do me down, and my reputation down, my command was established…[155]

[155] *A Slight Ache*, pp.179-180.

The ‘yesterday’ that Edward speaks of cannot literally be the previous day, but rather a time long before the matchseller became the unwanted guard at the back door. This was a time when Edward felt the strength and suppleness of youth, and his house reflected his untarnished (or, as he puts it ‘polished’) reputation. Now circumstances are much different, as the matchseller is ensconced outside, and he embodies, like the nettles and the grubby matchboxes, all that ‘stings’ or ‘tarnishes’. Edward has thus now lost his ‘command’, as he can no longer walk down to the back gate, since, in his mind, a blocked path outside his home and territory implies that he has ultimately failed in overcoming his ‘usurpers’. Near the conclusion of the play, then, the relationship between the territorial imperative and the imperious, self-righteous character is made especially clear, as it is evident that home, with its exclusory boundaries, is a space that can be used by the self-deceiving ego to define a rigid and inauthentic self-image.

Since Edward subscribes to the paranoiac worldview of ‘attack or be usurped’, and that he is now feeling so dejected and impotent, it is unsurprising that he offers no resistance to being displaced from his own territory. In the final moments of the play, all he can do is offer a whimsical eulogy for a time when he had been untouched by the hand of death:

> Yes, I would seek a tree, a cranny of bushes, erect my canopy and so make shelter. And rest.
>
> [*Low murmur*.]
>
> And then I no longer heard the wind or saw the sun. Nothing entered, nothing left my nook. I lay on my side in my polo shorts, my fingers lightly in contact with the blades of grass, the earthflowers […]

> [*Pause*.]
>
> But then, the time came. I saw the wind. I saw the wind, swirling, swirling, swirling, and the dust at my back gate, lifting, and the long grass, scything together…
>
> [*Slowly, in horror*.] You are laughing. You're laughing. Your face. Your body.
>
> [*Overwhelming nausea and horror*.]
>
> Rocking…gasping…rocking…heaving…rocking….
>
> You're laughing at me! Aaaaahhhh![156]

The 'slight ache' for Edward was, like the first grey hair, a muffled note signifying impending old age and death. Now, at this juncture, Edward tolls the death knell himself, as he talks about a time when he was, quite literally, sheltered from the world, but follows it up with a grim acknowledgement that the 'time came' when death announced itself. As the audience knows, death has not come in the garb of the grim reaper, but in the guise of a crippled matchseller, who now administers the fatal blow to Edward's ego by finding his existence extremely funny. In response, Edward can only but let out what is, in essence, an existential howl of pain, as he sees with horrifying clarity that his life is indeed so absurd and so much a failure that, when Flora takes the matchseller on a tour of 'his' garden, Edward does not protest being reduced to the status of matchseller. Now that his inflated and distorted ego has been fatally wounded, he feels no need to defend his territory.

III

When Freud wrote on the subject of psychological defences, he famously and succinctly remarked, 'The ego is not even master in its own house'.[157] To put this

[156] *A Slight Ache*, pp.182-183.

matter more prosaically, what Freud meant was that, as long as the ego denies and represses certain instincts, it cannot sustain, with great confidence, the role of a commanding and rational agent. On the contrary, the ego is condemned to assert a defensive territoriality of the self, as its strategic aim is to keep continual guard, so that repressed material never irrupts into consciousness. Still, as Freud suggests, this strategy never definitively works, as the repressed material is capable of gaining entry as a familiar stranger, and can, in severe cases, wreak havoc.

In *A Slight Ache*, the audience witnesses Edward trying to maintain, in a territorial fashion, the 'sanctity' of his self. Indeed, the 'lord of the manor' can only pretend to be master in his own house by disavowing many painful thoughts and feelings, which are attributed to members of society that live outside his 'hunting ground'. Nevertheless, after his long, and seemingly one-sided debacle with the match-selling familiar stranger, Edward's self-image becomes thoroughly dismantled, as the psychological truth usurps his self-concept, whilst the old man, goaded on by Flora, usurps him from his territory. At the conclusion of the play, Pinter could not therefore give a clearer indication of how much he construes the territorial imperative as a defensive psychological manoeuvre, as his character, Edward, had transformed 'a psychic conflict into a spatial one'.

Regarding this section, I wish to offer a real life example of this territorial imperative before examining whether Pinter's portrayal of the psycho-dynamics of class divisions possesses any cogency.

Dealing with the former issue first, an excellent real-life example of a collective assertion of the territorial imperative is how UKIP-supporting Brits possess a strong desire to control the country's boundary so that 'asylum seekers' cannot

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[157] Freud, qtd in Arthur H. Modell's, *The Private Self* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), p.171.

'infiltrate' the UK. Here are some of the main bullet-point comments made in their *2005 Pocket Policy guide to Immigration*:

> **UKIP will:**
>
> *End mass uncontrolled and unlimited immigration
>
> *Regain control of our borders
>
> *End support for multiculturalism and promote one, common British culture.[158]

These policy claims are persuasive to a group of people, who are subject to the following paranoid worldview: 1) they believe their country (as their territory) is being 'polluted' by people of divergent cultures, such that what constitutes 'Britishness' is becoming 'diluted'; 2) they believe that what their country needs are 'strong' borders that will provide the antidote to the present 'uncontrolled and unlimited leakage'.

There are, of course, many reasons for the (re) emergence of this worldview, but, in my opinion, David Bell provides a plausible psycho-political explanation for this collective reaction in the following passage:

> Entry of the immigrant is experienced, in a certain manner, as the return of the repressed; or, as Jeremy Harding has aptly put it, 'the asylum seeker is now the luminous apparition at the foot of the bed'. Further support for this

[158] *UKIP 2005 Pocket Policy Guide to Immigration* <http://web.archive.org/web/20100704035614/http:/www.ukip.org/media/policies/PPimmigration.pdf>

> projective system derives from the fact that, through our colonial history, we are all implicated in the horrors from which so many are fleeing. Through these processes, any guilt that might arise from such awareness is evaded. The more the in-group is whipped up into such hatred, the more difficult it becomes to confront the damage caused, which would bring unmanageable feelings of guilt. In the case of asylum seekers, this appears to reach a kind of climax with the announcement of detention camps and 'fast-track' disposal.[159]

Bell's suggestion that British prejudicial attitudes towards immigrants are a symptom of our guilt over our colonial past is intriguing, but what is most relevant for our discussion is that he provides a cogent and straightforward explanation for why this divisive perspective inevitably involves a territorial defensiveness over one's identity as well as over one's physical space: in a similar manner to Pinter's Edward, these people erect a literal border that acts as a means of preventing contact and engagement with those that carry the burden of their projections. Indeed, Edward and UKIP supporters differ only to the extent that the former's territorial imperative has more 'demoniac mastery' over his personality, which suggests that the more the ego represses out of fear, the more the physical boundaries of the safe and the acceptable constrict.

Considering now Pinter's portrayal of class relations, it can be argued that his play is most insightful in its depiction of the psycho-political factors that contribute towards establishing and maintaining class divisions. To see that this is so, one must first consider the fact that there is no such thing as a 'raw', unmediated emotion;

[159] Bell, pp.67-68.

rather, as William Miller puts it, emotions are always 'inflected' by social and cultural contexts:

> Emotions are feelings linked to ways of talking about these feelings…Emotions, even the most visceral, are richly social, cultural and linguistic phenomena…Emotions are feelings connected to ideas, perceptions and cognitions and to the social and cultural contexts in which it makes sense to have these feelings and ideas…They give our world its peculiarly animated quality…[160]

The terms 'lower class', 'middle class' and 'upper class' illustrate Miller's point , as these social designations are emotionally evocative, in such a way that it would be impossible to understand their significance without considering the cultural context. Nevertheless, Miller's constructionist theory of emotion does acknowledge that cultural practices do utilise universal feelings (even if we can never separate them from their contextual expression and encounter them directly); indeed, one of the most important ones for the present discussion is a most visceral feeling, namely that of disgust. More fully, disgust is a feeling that is appropriated by those that wish to maintain the status quo, as they can label certain classes as 'lower', thereby creating an unflattering parallel between the 'body' politic and the animal functions of the human body. Sara Ahmed succinctly explains this process as follows:

> When thinking about how bodies become objects of disgust, we can see that disgust is crucial to power relations…disgust at 'that which is below'

[160] William Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), p.8.

> functions to maintain power relations between above and below, through which 'aboveness' and 'belowness' become properties of particular bodies, objects and spaces.[161]

In *A Slight Ache*, Edward's complaint about the matchseller's 'stench' and his nausea at touching the damp, rotting matchboxes, expose his underlying disgust towards the working classes. However, what is particularly interesting about Pinter's play is that he does not only allude to the connection between disgust and the maintenance of class divides, since he also shows how the emotion of disgust is a desperate attempt to re-erect the territoriality of the self. In fact, Pinter's portrayal of how the matchseller 'induces' Edward's vertiginous nausea is remarkably similar to the psychoanalytical idea of the 'abject'. Hyun-Jung Lee describes this concept as follows:

> Capable of destabilising the ego by its mere presence, the abject is that which has been ejected/rejected in the immemorial past in order to establish the boundaries of the self. In the retching that occurs at the sight of the object, the body registers an oblivion that was forcibly equated in the originary moment that gave birth to the 'I'.[162]

Lee's explanation of the nature of the abject suggests that it is has power to destabilise the bounded ego, because the presence of such an object intimates the return of the 'ejected'; consequently, in order to maintain its rigid demarcations (its 'territory') the

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[161] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p.89.
[162] Hyun-Jung Lee, 'One for Ever: Desire, Subjectivity and the Threat of the Abject in Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*' in *Vampires: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*, ed. Peter Day (New York: Rodopi B.V., 2006), pp.21-39 (p.30).

ego induces the emotion of nausea and disgust, as these are, psychologically speaking, forms of 'spitting out' offending material. In the play itself, Edward's reaction to the matchseller confirms this psychoanalytical account, as the old man's mere presence destabilises his very sense of middle-class identity, leading to the point where he suffers a form of psychological death, since what the matchseller represents had to be 'expelled' in the originary moment when his inauthentic self-image was 'born'.

The Room

In the previous section, we noted that Pinter posited a strong connection between the territorial imperative, the psychological mechanism of projection and self-alienation. In Pinter's first play, *The Room*, the psychological dynamics are somewhat similar, but in this work the playwright is concerned with the territorial imperative as a reparative move, in the sense of an attempt to heal one's alienation from one's true self.

To set the stage, as it were, for a discussion of this, consider first the role of territory in traditional domestic relations. Hanna Scolnicov provides one such account:

> The structural division of space into the interior and exterior of the house carries with it social and cultural implications. Gender roles are spatially defined in relation to the inside and the outside of the house. Traditionally, it is the woman who makes the house into a home, her home, while the world of commerce, war, travel, the world outside, is a man's world…From the spatial point of view, the world of man and the world of woman meet on the threshold.[163]

[163] Hannah Scolnicov, *Women's Theatrical Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.6.

The way in which these traditional gender roles are structured by space may seem quite innocuous, as women are consigned to the warm bosom of the house, whilst men attend to the economic necessities imposed on them by the outside world. Yet, in reality, this is no egalitarian arrangement, since, as Michael Kaufmann, for example, contends, masculinity, in a patriarchal society, is a quest for power:

> Through a very complex process, by the time a boy is five or six he claims for himself the power and activity society associates with masculinity. He embraces the project of controlling himself and controlling the world. He comes to personify activity. Masculinity is a reaction against passivity and powerlessness, and with it comes a repression of a vast range of human desires and possibilities: those that are associated with femininity.[164]

Kaufmann readily equates patriarchal masculinity with dominance, control and the forever-imminent threat of violence, which suggests that the relegation of women to the domestic sphere was the concrete expression of a power relationship, where men expected to be served by their faithful and subordinate wives. Indeed, perhaps this power relationship is at its most obvious when men became violent, as domestic violence was an assertion of dominance and a release of aggression against wives that could act as both servants and punch bags. In the passage below, Kaufmann explains why the domestic sphere was quite often a colosseum of cruelty:

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[164] Michael Kaufmann, 'The Construction of Masculinity and the Triad of Men's Violence' in *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays on Pleasure, Power and Change*, ed. Michael Kaufmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 1-29 (p.11).

> Within relationships, forms of men's violence such as rape, battery, and what Meg Luxton calls the 'petty tyranny' of male domination in the household must be understood both 'in terms of violence directed at women and against women as wives'. The family provides an arena for the expression of needs and emotions not considered legitimate elsewhere. It is one of the only places where men feel safe enough to express emotions. As the dams break, the flood pours out on women and children. The family also becomes the place where the violence suffered by individuals in their work lives is discharged.[165]

In *The Room*, Pinter explores many of these themes, as the psycho-political question that animates this work is this: what needs and phantasies compel women to comply with a domestic power structure, which exploits them and leaves them continually open to the threat of male violence? Pinter's somewhat surprising answer is that women, in a patriarchal society, are not given enough emotional nourishment to grow into authentic and autonomous individuals, which means that they compulsively cling to their 'rooms' and to their husbands in the hope that they will receive the love and acceptance that they need. More fully, according to Pinter, what particularly powers this process is the phantasy that the domestic sphere can act as an 'intimate space', which is a place where the fragile authentic self can safely emerge and become itself in a loving and supportive atmosphere.

Pinter's position, it must be admitted, might seem contrived and convoluted, as he certainly posits what would appear to be unobvious connections between the territorial imperative, the drive-to-authenticity and domestic oppression. In the following section, I wish to preface my close reading of the play with a brief account

[165] Kaufmann, p.16.

of several key Winnicottian ideas, as they offer one plausible explanation for the purported connection between self-actualisation, and the need for an intimate 'holding' space.

I

Perhaps the most useful and relevant way to begin the discussion of the connection between the actualisation of an authentic self and the appropriation of a holding space is to consider again the key existentialist concept of the 'sheltered being'. For the reader's convenience, I have re-quoted Bachelard:

> In the life of man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human being's first world. Before he is 'cast into the world', as claimed by certain hasty metaphysics, man is laid in the cradle of the house. And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle. A concrete metaphysics cannot neglect this fact, this simple fact, all the more, since this fact is a value, an important value, to which we return in our daydreaming. Being is already a value. Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house.

In this richly poetic meditation on what it means to be a 'sheltered being', Bachelard describes several of its key features that are worthy of further examination. Firstly, and most basically, Bachelard suggests that, in the earliest stages of life, the human being must exist in an enclosed, protected space; as he himself puts it, 'Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house'. What he

means is that long ‘before [the individual] is cast into the world’ he must exist in a protected space (his ‘first world’), as the human baby, who is growing both physically and psychologically, needs to live in a world that is tailored to him. In object relations theory, this originary space, which nurtures and protects the emerging authentic self, is known as a facilitating environment, because it acts to eliminate anything that interferes with the baby’s self-actualization.

Another important point that Bachelard makes in the above passage is that home’s ‘councils of continuity are unceasing’, which means that man is not ‘a dispersed being’. My understanding of Bachelard is that he is suggesting that a protected space anchors the human being in the world, such that he feels ‘centred’, rather than having to react to a multitude of different external and intrusive impressions. Clearly, the infant’s original protected space is the ideal example of this, as this space fosters authentic action, since the nascent self, in its fragile integrity, is the originator of all the individual’s behaviour.

Assuming that this psychological theory about the primacy of the ‘protected space’ is indeed true, one of its most important implications is that those individuals who have never achieved an original protected space have had little opportunity for their authentic selves to be incarnated in the world; instead, they exist as ‘dispersed’ beings, who conform to a number of false and alienating roles. This is why Bachelard implies that the existence or non-existence of a protected space determines an individual’s very being.

With these fundamentals in mind, I want to establish how Winnicott argues for the position that the original nurturing space (his term is ‘holding environment’) constitutes an incubator for selfhood. In the following passage, Winnicott proposes

that what allows the self ('the kernel') to grow is the mother's nurturing environment ('the shell'):

> The centre of gravity of the being does not start off in the individual. It is in the total set-up. By good-enough child care, technique, holding, and general management the shell becomes gradually taken over and the kernel can begin to be an individual…The human being now developing an entity from the centre can become localized in the baby's body and so can begin to create an external world at the same time as acquiring a limiting membrane and an inside.[166]

According to Winnicott, the authentic self can only emerge and be 'incarnated' in its body if the mother nurtures the infant in what can be termed a holding space. This point is reinforced in a well-known passage from another work, where he pinpoints a number of factors, which allow the baby to achieve, for the first time, a rudimentary form of identity:

> No doubt the instinctual experiences contribute richly to the integration process, but there is also all the time the good enough environment, someone holding the infant, and adapting well enough to changing needs. That someone cannot function except through the sort of love that is appropriate at this stage, love that carries a capacity for identification with the infant, and a feeling of adaptation to need is worthwhile. We say that the mother is devoted to her infant, temporarily but truly…

[166] D.W. Winnicott, 'Anxiety Associated with Insecurity' in *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis* (London: Hogarth Press, 1978), pp.97-100 (p.99).

> I suggest that this I AM moment is a raw moment; the new individual feels infinitely exposed. Only if someone has her arms round the infant at this time can the I AM moment be endured, or rather, perhaps, risked.[167]

This passage depicts a scenario that accords well with Bachelard's views, as Winnicott insists that what facilitates the emergence of the fragile authentic self is that it feels that it can assert itself without fear of being attacked by harmful impingements from the wider world. These are points that he puts even more directly in the following passage, where he makes a Bachelard-like reference to the continuity of being:

> With the care it receives from its mother each infant is able to have a personal existence, and so begins to build up what might be called a continuity of being. On the basis of this continuity of being the inherited potential gradually develops into an individual infant. If maternal care is not good enough then the infant does not really come into existence, since there is no continuity of being; instead the personality becomes built on the basis of reactions to environmental impingement.[168]

Another, less obvious feature that Winnicott mentioned in the above passage is that a key component of this holding environment is the mother's love, in particular her empathic mirroring of the infant's moods and expressions. As he remarks in the above passage, it is essential that the love that the mother shows the infant at this

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[167] D.W. Winnicott, 'Group Influences and the Maladjusted Child' in *The Family and Individual Development*, (London: Routledge, 2006), pp.214-227 (pp.217-218).
[168] D.W. Winnicott, 'The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship' in *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (London: Hogarth, 1965), p.54.

stage ‘carries a capacity for identification’. This can be understood more fully if we consider another excerpt from his writings:

> What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother’s face? I am suggesting that ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself. In other words, the mother is looking at the baby, and what she looks like is related to what she sees there. All this is too easily taken for granted. I am asking that this which is naturally done well by mothers who are caring for their babies shall not be taken for granted. I can make my point by going straight over to the case of the baby whose mother reflects her own mood, or, worse still, the rigidity of her own defences. In such a case, what does the baby see? First their own creative capacity begins to atrophy, and in some way or other they look around for other ways of getting something of themselves back from the environment…The mother’s face is not then a mirror.[169]

As Winnicott implies, the reason the holding environment can be called an intimate space that ‘incubates’ the self is that it not only provides a secure boundary in which the authentic self can act, but it also mirrors, or reflects, the infant’s emerging subjectivity; indeed, this nurturing space allows the self to feel that the world affirms its existence rather than it being its antagonist, and so a crucial existential conviction is formed. In essence, the mother’s face as ‘mirror’ metaphorically ‘holds’ together the infant’s fragile subjectivity, as her mutable, empathic expressions reflect the changing moods of her baby, and thus give them continuity and a sense of being grounded in the actual world. Kenneth Wright puts it this way:

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[169] D.W. Winnicott, ’Mirror-Role of Mother and Family in Child Development’ in *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock, 1971), pp.111-1118 (p.112).

> Under these circumstances, being looked at gives the self a sense of continuity that would otherwise be lacking. It is as though such a person can say: 'I am seen, therefore I am'.[170]

II

In the opening stage directions of *The Room*, Pinter provides his readers with a description of the play's austere setting:

> *Scene: A room in a large house. A door down right. A gas-fire down left. A gas-stove and sink, up left. A window up centre. A table and chairs, centre. A rocking-chair, left centre. The foot of a double-bed protrudes from alcove, up right.*[171]

This room constitutes a stark setting, as their life is circumscribed by their basic needs rather than driven by their wants. Indeed, the room describes and defines its occupants as the type of people whose basic needs for warmth, food and shelter are being just met and no more. Later in the play, Pinter will develop the emotional resonance that this room carries, but, for the moment, he presents his audience with what looks like the setting for a naturalistic 'kitchen sink' drama.

The opening scene depicts a good example of 'domestic tyranny', as Rose Hudd serves her husband, Bert, his dinner, whilst he sits reading a magazine, in a pose that suggests that he is, emotionally speaking, unreachable. Evidently, this is no loving home, as Bert shows absolutely no interest in his wife's tea-time prattle, which nevertheless fails to discourage Rose from talking. Already Pinter has sketched what

[170] Kenneth Wright, *Vision and Separation: Between Mother and Baby* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1991), p.50.
[171] Pinter, *The Room* in *Harold Pinter: Plays 1* (London: Faber, 1991), p.85.

could be called the choreography of domestic oppression, as Rose's quick, servile movements are matched by Bert's unimpeachable, yet lackadaisical stillness. On an emotional level, it could be said that Rose is 'dancing to Bert's tune', as she, as wife and servant, runs about to receive love and attention, whilst he, as master, quietly sits, waiting on what he wants to come to him. Above all else, what powers this relationship from Rose's point of view is the hope of reciprocation, and the hope of recognition. So desperate are these hopes that Rose fails to see the obvious: Bert is incapable of appreciating and loving her.

Rose's chatter becomes more pronounced as the play unfolds, and consequently, she reveals, albeit inadvertently, how her emotional needs fuel both this exploitative relationship and her recurring phantasies. She provides the first clue about the actualities of her predicament when she obscurely refers to an 'illness' that prevents her from leaving her room. A quote from Bachelard on the 'sheltered being' will help to explicate the significance of her remark:

> In the most interminable of dialectics, the sheltered being gives perceptible limits to his shelter. He experiences the house in its reality and in its virtuality, by means of thoughts and dreams.[172]

Bachelard makes quite a simple point here, namely that an intimate space (one's home, in other words) is created by the person 'infusing' that space with a deeply personal meaning. In the play itself, this is shown by Rose's dialogue implicitly suggesting that her room is both a literal space and a phantasmal construction, as she

[172] Bachelard, p.5.

is compelled to repeatedly describe it as a shelter from the cold. Two examples make this clear:

> You can feel it in here. Still, the room keeps warm. It's better than the basement, anyway.[173]

> No, this room's all right for me. I mean, you know where you are. When it's cold, for instance.[174]

On one level, Rose's mention of the importance of a warm home would not seem like an odd reference to audiences, because, as Claire Langhamer explains, the warmth of a 1950s working-class household was one of the key features of a good home:

> 'Home' is a fluid concept, open to multiple meanings: a house is not necessarily a home. As outlined by Richard Hoggart in his semi-autobiographical account of working-class culture, the 'good' 1950's working-class house boasted warmth and a 'good table'.[175]

On a deeper level, however, Rose's recurring thoughts about the cold outside and the purported warmth inside are signs of an obsession, as the housewife's inability to leave the room suggests that the cold represents something terribly frightening, perhaps even annihilating. More to the point, what Rose's rocking chair musings indicate is that she lives in a phantasmal space, which she portrays, somewhat self-

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[173] *The Room*, p.85.
[174] *The Room*, p.86.
[175] Claire Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History* 40 no.2 (2005) 341-362 (p.346).

deceivingly, as being warm, so that she can repress her anxieties over the prospect of being thrown out by Bert into the cold, abandoning world outside. In truth, then, what Rose's teatime digressions indicate is that she lacks a nurturing or holding environment that mirrors the stirrings of her authentic self. Due to this lack she endures a subjugated way of life, as her patriarchal role as housewife involves an exploitation of these anxious feelings, no matter how much she might otherwise insist that the room is 'warm'.

Rose, as we have noted, suffers from distressing phantasies that are all centred on the unacknowledged theme of abandonment. Consequently, her reveries come to reveal that her authentic self has already been rejected by her way of life in the room; indeed, just like any other act of self-deception, Rose's monologue makes reference to that which she is trying to deny, which is that her authentic self has become a stranger to her, because she lives in such a 'cold' environment. In terms of what she actually says, her talk circles around the symbolic import of the basement, as it is a place that both frightens and yet fascinates her, since it is supposed to harbour 'foreigners'[176] that she has never seen. At one point in particular her inner restlessness is especially evident, as she tries, without success, to find out from Bert who lives down there:

> I've never seen who it is. Who is it? Who lives down there? I'll have to ask. I mean, you might as well know, Bert. But whoever it is, it can't be too cosy.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> I think it's changed hands since I was last there. I didn't see who moved in then. I mean the first time it was taken.

[176] *The Room*, p87.

> *Pause*.
>
> Anyway, I think they've gone now.
>
> *Pause*.
>
> But I think someone else has gone in now. I wouldn't like to live in that basement. Did you ever see the walls? They were running…[177]

Rose's suspicion that the basement is occupied might seem a strange thing to say, as she cannot know who lives down there; what makes it comprehensible, though, is that this space has been colonised by her imagination in order to represent the subterranean elements of her psyche. Bachelard confirms that such a thing is possible when he remarks that, in general, the lower parts of the house become a phantasmal space, which comes to represent what is both repressed and feared:

> It [the cellar] will be rationalized and its conveniences enumerated. But it is first and foremost the *dark entity* of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces. When we dream there, we are in harmony with the irrationality of the depths.[178]

Bachelard's reference to 'subterranean forces' seems ominous, but, in Rose's case, what the basement represents is that her authentic self has become 'foreign' to her, because her life with Bert represents such a 'cold' world that any warmth that is proffered can never keep the 'damp' from surrounding the imprisoned, yet barely insulated self. What can therefore be said is that this is a self that is trapped, and yet nakedly exposed, as it is crying out in its own veiled way for intimacy, in particular an

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[177] *The Room*, p.86.
[178] Bachelard, p.18.

intimate space where it can be loved and nurtured. Of course, as intimated earlier, Rose herself consciously protests against acknowledging this profound lack of intimacy, as she has become a propagandist for her way of life with Bert in order to convince imagined interlocutors:

> If they ever ask you, Bert, I'm quite happy where I am. We're quiet, we're all right. You're happy up here. It's not far up either, when you come up from inside. And we're not bothered. And nobody bothers us.[179]

Rose's remark that she is 'quite happy' is an ironic comment, but what is most ironic is claiming that 'nobody bothers us', as she is persistently hounded by her own alienated self. In fact, as much as Rose protests otherwise, what she really needs is someone to 'bother her', so that the 'foreign' self that is 'locked away' in the basement can be encouraged to come forward and become embodied. If this were to happen, then it can be said that Rose will have truly have come 'home'.

A candidate for this role does not immediately arrive, however, as Mr Kidd, the supposed landlord, visits instead. Upon arriving, Rose seizes the opportunity to find out who these 'foreigners' are, as she quite naturally assumes that Mr Kidd would know the answers. However, Mr Kidd is a rambling, perhaps senile old man, who cannot even give a direct answer to the question of how many floors there are in the building:

> MR KIDD: Floors. (*He laughs*). Ah, we had a good few of them in the old days.

[179] *The Room*, p.87.

ROSE: How many have you got now?

MR KIDD: Well, to tell you the truth, I don't count them now.

ROSE: Oh.

MR KIDD: No, not now.

ROSE: It must be a bit of a job.

MR KIDD: Oh, I used to count them, once. Never got tired of it…[180]

Without question, Mr Kidd's digressions serve a comic purpose, as they provide some light relief from the prevailing sombre, menacing tone of the play. Nevertheless, the main reason that Pinter introduces the bumbling Mr Kidd is that his digressions, in a similar manner to Rose's, reveal certain unconscious desires and phantasies. More fully, as his name suggests, the landlord is symbolically associated with childhood, as his rambling descriptions intimate, in a most subtle way, not only why Rose is childishly drawn to Bert, but also what kind of figure can liberate her from her domestic bondage. Mr Kidd's description of his life with his sister indeed suggests such features:

> Yes, that's right, it was after she died that I must have stopped counting. She used to keep things in very good trim. And I gave her a helping hand. She was very grateful, right until her last. She used to tell me how much she appreciated all the–little things–that I used to do for her. Then she copped it. I was her senior. Yes, I was her senior. She had a lovely boudoir. A beautiful boudoir.[181]

[180] *The Room*, p.92.
[181] *The Room*, p.93.

Apart from giving a very condensed, and somewhat jarring, summary of his life with his sister, what we have here is that Mr Kidd's sister played a part in an incestuous transference phantasy. This can be inferred from his tone, as Mr Kidd talks about his sister as though he doted on her and wanted to help his 'mummy', and his interest in her 'beautiful boudoir' is obviously sexual in nature. Yet what is even more indicative of his incestuous phantasies is that he actually has to remind himself that he was her senior, as he had imagined her, in his phantasies, as his mother.

Mr Kidd's talk may be somewhat incoherent, but it still resonates with Rose, as it prompts her to reveal, albeit unconsciously, her own incestuous transference phantasy: she is very curious, if not quite obsessed, about his bedroom, as he is, to some extent, a father-figure for her. More specifically, Rose, at first, admits that she thought his bedroom was in the back, although she confesses she never actually knew, whilst on another occasion she suddenly asks him where it is, as she is compelled to determine the location of his 'lovely boudoir':

> ROSE: You full at the moment, Mr Kidd?
>
> MR KIDD: Packed out.
>
> ROSE: All sorts, I suppose?
>
> MR KIDD: Oh yes, I make ends meet.
>
> ROSE: We do, too, don't we, Bert?
>
> *Pause*.
>
> Where's your bedroom now, Mr Kidd?[182]

[182] *The Room*, p.93.

What Pinter implies with these correspondences is that Rose and Mr Kidd often talk at cross-purposes, but they dream in parallel. In both cases, it can be inferred that these characters are drawn to parental substitutes that provide them, so it is hoped, with some love and security, even if it is conditional on making themselves 'useful', as Mr Kidd did with his sister. The thematic meaning that therefore emerges after this short scene is that the domestic subjugation that Rose tolerates, in fact even embraces, is an attempt from her to foster a parent-child relationship, where she can be nurtured in an intimate space to the point of her self being released. If a visitor is thus to come, he must be, as far as Rose is concerned, a father substitute, as her authentic self yearns for the support and encouragement of a loving parent.

After Bert and Mr Kidd leave the room, embarking on their separate ventures, the audience can see most tangibly how much Rose is dependent on a parent substitute. Left to her own devices, Rose feels that she must distract herself so that she can try and ignore the encroaching loneliness that almost envelops the room. Unsurprisingly, given her clingy disposition, Rose finds it difficult to disregard Bert's absence, and she is almost tempted to gaze out of the window to get one last look at her husband before he departs into the night time wilderness:

> *She stands, watching the door, then turns slowly to the table, picks up the magazine, and puts it down. She stands and listens, goes to the fire, bends, lights the fire and warms her hands. She stands and looks about the room. She looks at the window and listens, goes quickly to the window, stops and straightens the curtain…*[183]

[183] *The Room*, pp.95-96.

Although Rose fears that Bert may not return, and she will be left alone, to her surprise she discovers, when she opens the door, that a couple are disclosed on the landing. Pinter introduces the Sands couple at this juncture, as Mrs Sands has not yet been 'domesticated', and so the playwright wishes to depict what patriarchy, embodied in this young belligerent man, sees as its 'antagonist'. One exchange in particular is rich with symbolic significance, as it suggests that patriarchy must squash what a woman 'sees', whether it be with their head or with their heart. This is when Mr Sands rules out the possibility that his wife saw a star:

> MRS SANDS: Now I come to think of it, I saw a star.
>
> MR SANDS: You saw what?
>
> MRS SANDS: Well, I think I did.
>
> MR SANDS: You think you saw what?
>
> MRS SANDS: A star.
>
> MR SANDS: Where?
>
> MRS SANDS: In the sky.
>
> MR SANDS: When?
>
> MRS SANDS: As we were coming along.
>
> MR SANDS: Go home.
>
> MRS SANDS: What do you mean?
>
> MR SANDS: You didn't see a star.
>
> MRS SANDS: Why not?
>
> MR SANDS: Because I am telling you. I'm telling you, you didn't see a star.
>
> *Pause.*[184]

[184] *The Room*, pp.97-98.

Mr Sands' insistence that his wife did not see a star is frightfully immature, and because of this, their exchange may seem like a domestic spat with no underlying significance. In reality, it is a calculated gesture, as Mr Sands wishes, like any other authoritarian, to inculcate in his victim the perspective that the truth is always based on the reigning orthodoxy. He has not fully succeeded, though, as his wife is still prepared to assert the veracity of her own perceptions, even if she conceded ground on the matter of seeing the star:

> MRS SANDS: You're sitting down!
>
> MR SANDS (*jumping up*): Who is?
>
> MRS SANDS: You were.
>
> MR SANDS: Don't be silly. I perched.
>
> MRS SANDS: I saw you sit down.
>
> MR SANDS: You did not see me sit down because I did not sit bloody well down. I perched.
>
> MRS SANDS: Do you think I can't perceive when someone's sitting down?
>
> MR SANDS: Perceive! That's all you do. Perceive.[185]

Mr Sands' contempt for his wife's 'perceptions' is most conspicuous here, as he wants Mrs Sands to see only what he wishes her to see. Overall, what Pinter is intimating is that, if women unconsciously seek a father figure, then their emotional dependency, their hunger for approval and recognition, ensures that they lose touch with their own truth. An alternative way of expressing this important point is that

[185] *The Room*, p.100.

transposing the past onto a dimly related present means not to 'see', as one's overbearing and unresolved emotional needs distort reality. There is no better example of this within the play than Rose's attitude towards Bert, as she is so attached to her husband that she wilfully mistakes infantile solipsism and aggression for emotional strength. She is, in a word, 'blind' to her situation.

Having established that, in his view, domestic relationships in a patriarchal society are based upon a truth-denying dependence, Pinter now puts Rose into direct confrontation with what she fears. Although the audience knows that this frightened housewife's anxieties are caused by her own self-estrangement, and exacerbated by her own denial, she herself is blind to this; consequently, Mr Kidd's insistence that she meet the man from the basement becomes a terrifying prospect, as it will be, so she thinks, an encounter with a persecuting 'Other'. Nevertheless, Mr Kidd proves to be persuasive, and soon afterwards a blind black man emerges from the basement much to Rose's horror, as his blackness inevitably associates him with the dark, forbidding basement. Feeling so overwhelmed by his presence, and so vulnerable due to Bert's absence, Rose pretends that she is much stronger than she is so that she can discourage this supposed miscreant from taking advantage of her:

> You've got a grown-up woman in this room, do you hear? Or are you deaf too? You're not deaf too, are you? You're all deaf and dumb and blind, the lot of you. A bunch of cripples.[186]

This cruel and hateful invective indicates that, from the moment Riley came into the room, he became a scapegoat for Rose's domestic frustrations against Bert and

[186] *The Room*, pp.106-107.

against her own weaknesses. In essence, Riley's entrance reveals that Rose hates all men ('A bunch of cripples') because she, throughout her life, has been so unqualifiedly dependent on them, as her cloying, clinging behaviour betrays that she expects so much in return, and they have failed her. In fact, they have reduced her to the indignity of always feeling like a little frightened child, who is too scared to assert herself, lest she destroy an already very tenuous bond. Indeed, the fact that she breaks from her neurotic protocol with Riley is as much a sign that her domestic relationship constitutes, for her, a trade for affection, as it betrays the underlying hostility that comes when the implicit bargaining is not honoured and she is forced to confront the embodiment of her own self-alienation and of 'crippled' manhood.

Yet, as much as Riley may seem to be a nightmarish embodiment of her fears, his presence in her room proves to be a cathartic one. Although Rose is singularly unaware of this, the fact is that it is her domestic situation, and not Riley, that is the nightmare that she must awaken from. Very shortly afterwards, this mysterious, yet strangely familiar black man, proves to be the required parental figure that she needs, as he implores the embittered and scared housewife to come 'home':

RILEY: Your father wants you to come home.

Pause.

ROSE: Home?

RILEY: Yes.

ROSE: Home? Go now. Come on. It's late. It's late.

RILEY: To come home.

ROSE: Stop it. I can't take it. What do you want? What do you want?

RILEY: Come home, Sal.[187]

Riley's message to 'come home' conveys a truth that Rose has been blind to for many years, namely that her room is not her actual home and that she has, with an acute homesickness, been longing to return to the family hearth. Furthermore, and far more subtly, Riley also quietly implores her to leave the room so that she stops this neurotic masquerade, and returns to her home as her authentic self, Sal.

While she is reluctant to receive his message, Riley, as father figure, nevertheless persists in his mission, and significantly, he creates there and then an intimate space, a holding environment that Rose has been desperately searching for:

RILEY: Now I touch you.

ROSE: Don't touch me.

RILEY: Sal.

ROSE: I can't.

RILEY: I want you to come home.

ROSE: No.

RILEY: With me.

ROSE: I can't.

RILEY: I waited to see you.

ROSE: Yes.

RILEY: Now I see you.

ROSE: Yes.

RILEY: Sal.

[187] *The Room*, p.108.

ROSE: Not that.

RILEY: So, now.

Pause.

So, now.[188]

In a play where physical intimacy and emotional connection have previously been so conspicuously absent, Riley's gestures and remarks prove to be cathartic, because they embody and epitomise the two main features of a holding space. Firstly, a holding environment is when the carer literally holds the other in their arms (or in their hands, in this case) and provides a warm and safe boundary, where the nascent self feels secure and loved enough to make that decisive venture into being embodied. Riley's 'holding' of Rose therefore provides that warmth and sense of protection that she had longed for in her room, but could not receive.

Secondly, and more importantly, Riley holds Rose in the metaphorical sense as well, as his maternal-like dedication to her mood music lends her feelings both tangibility and clarity, as they are given a definiteness of form when Rose is held in his 'aural gaze'. Peter Wilberg describes the 'aural gaze' as follows:

> In a quite tangible way we can 'hold' someone in our gaze. In a similar way we can hold someone in our listening attention– in our 'aural gaze'. We become aware of holding someone holding us in their listening gaze when we feel it subtly deepening the way we listen to ourselves as we speak. 'Handling'

[188] *The Room*, pp.108-109.

> is the silent modulation of the tone and touch of our listening gaze, turning it into a carrier wave on which messages are transmitted and received…
>
> To talk of 'touch' here is not a 'mere' metaphor. Listening is itself a form of 'inner vibrational touch'. As listeners we touch each other with the tendrils of our intent–the fibres of our listening body.[189]

Wilberg describes the 'aural gaze' as occurring when the listener is listening so carefully and so empathically that the person feels that their meaning has, as the telling metaphor says, been 'grasped', and that their experience, as a self, has therefore been acknowledged and made real. Riley, of course, does this for the first time in Rose's life, such that she is now able to embody her repressed, 'basement' self, and admit to feelings that were previously so vague and alien. In a word, Rose is now able to 'see', and thus acknowledge her entrapment in her room:

> ROSE: I've been here.
>
> RILEY: Yes.
>
> ROSE: Long.
>
> RILEY: Yes.
>
> ROSE: The day is a hump. I never go out.
>
> RILEY: No.
>
> ROSE: I've been here.
>
> RILEY: Come home now, Sal.[190]

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[189] Peter Wilberg, *The Therapist as Listener: Martin Heidegger and the Missing Dimension of Counselling and Psychotherapy Training* (Sussex: New Gnosis, 2004), pp.24-25.
[190] *The Room*, p.109.

Although Rose's remark that 'The day is a hump. I never go out' is a cliché, it nevertheless captures her own 'crippled' state of being, such that it constitutes an admission that helps her move towards being whole (or, in psychoanalytic terms, 'integrated'). Indeed, with such an acknowledgement having been made, Rose has shed, at least temporarily, the mask of the housewife and become her authentic self, Sal. From Riley's point of view, he is acutely aware of this change and he realises that this is the time to make his final, declarative plea: 'Come home now, Sal'.

Tragically, such a plea is barely uttered, however, when Bert returns from his van deliveries only to find an intruder in his home, in particular a black man. True to his character, Bert recognises, with an animal-like intuition, his wife's closeness to this stranger, and he realises, rather quickly, that this poses a threat to his established way of life in the room. Proceeding very carefully, Bert talks about his hazardous trip out on the icy roads before he launches his vicious and racist attack:

> *He takes the chair from the table and sits to the left of the* NEGRO'S *chair, close to it. He regards the* NEGRO *for some moments. Then with his foot he lifts the armchair up. The* NEGRO *falls on to the floor. He rises slowly.*
>
> RILEY: Mr Hudd, your wife–
>
> BERT: Lice!
>
> *He strikes the* NEGRO, *knocking him down, and then kicks his head against the gas-stove several times. The* NEGRO *lies still.* BERT *walks away.*
>
> *Silence.*
>
> ROSE *stands clutching her eyes.*
>
> ROSE: Can't see. I can't see. I can't see.[191]

[191] *The Room*, p.110.

Bert's attack on Riley is undoubtedly a successful attempt to regain dominance over both his territory and his wife, as he not only silences his opponent, he also reinstates Rose's previous 'blindness': her repeated exclamations that she 'can't see' constitute the concluding lines of the play, suggesting that *The Room* ends on a decidedly tragic note because an intimate space may have been formed, but it did not achieve that 'council of continuity'[192], to use Bachelard's apt phrase.

Due to this lack of a sustained nurturing space, then, Rose's authentic self is fatally undermined, such that she returns, albeit with an acute awareness of her loss, to her blind, 'crippled' state of being. Pinter thus underscores his conviction that there may be a longing for an intimate space, and there may also be indeed a drive towards self-actualisation, but if society does not provide a 'facilitating environment', these needs go unrecognised, much to the benefit of a patriarchal society.

III

In this section on *The Room*, we have observed that Pinter has established intriguing connections between the territorial imperative, the drive-to-authenticity and domestic oppression. Dealing with the former two first, Pinter suggested that the territorial imperative in this case (i.e., that need to defend one's home) is an expression of the longing of the authentic self for an intimate space, where it can dwell and be itself without harmful intrusions from the outside world. Rose Hudd, of course, epitomises this quest for a nurturing space, because she wishes, on some deep and unarticulated level, to come home so that she can live again as Sal. Indeed, what Pinter essentially shows in this play is that the territorial imperative can be a search for love and

[192] Bachelard, p.6.

security, as the individual seeking, albeit unwittingly, to become her authentic self is looking for a parental figure that will foster such a facilitating environment. According to Pinter, it was this hope of a warm and loving environment that kept Rose in domestic bondage to Bert until the arrival of Riley provided what had otherwise seemed like a radical and unlikely possibility.

Regarding the psycho-political significance of this work, Pinter's portrayal of the connection between home and authenticity can be said to have some credibility, providing that we accept certain ideas from psychoanalytical theory. Where matters become more difficult, however, is in justifying his viewpoint that these psychodynamic factors contribute to patriarchal oppression within the household, in the sense that it was women's lack of emotional autonomy that imprisoned them in their rooms, with their 'petty tyrant' husbands.

In response, what should first be noted is that Pinter was accurately reflecting contemporary working-class gender roles; for one thing, as Stephen Brooke remarks, the relationship between gender and the working-class was shaped overall by an ideology that argued that women's place was essentially in the home:

> In the formation and development of the British working classes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the articulation of class was often intertwined with gender. The idea of the skilled independent worker, for example, was not only an expression of a class ideal, but also a valorisation of a particular gender ideology. Within such an ideology, femininity had to serve as a counterpoint to the male breadwinner; if work defined the gender and class identity of men, maternity did so for working class women. Domestic

> work in the private sphere, including maternity, rather than paid work in the public sphere was seen as the normative state of working class femininity.[193]

This segregation of roles and responsibilities was still prevalent during the period that Pinter's play was written, as confirmed, for example, by a study conducted by Elizabeth Bott:

> In her study of twenty families between 1953 and 1957, seven of which were working-class, Elizabeth Bott noted little change over time in gender relations. The Newbolts a working class couple from Bermondsey demonstrated a significant amount of conjugal separation in social life and domestic work, a feature Bott suggested was also notable in other working class couples.[194]

Given that the home life of working-class couples in the 1950s reinforced, in general, this segregation of roles, it may be asked if Pinter's psycho-political account of why they endured patriarchal oppression in the home is credible. At first glance, 'no' appears to be the definitive answer, because, as the previous excerpts have suggested, ideological pressures would have normalized these roles. Nevertheless, such a position may be a hasty and uncomprehensive rebuttal, as it overlooks the nature of Pinter's perspective, which is focused on the emotional hunger that inadvertently serves to perpetuate domestic oppression. More fully, a case can also be made that gender roles are the product of childhood impotence 'married' to certain insidious power relations. Michael Kaufman, in his essay on male violence, explains this as follows:

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[193] Stephen Brooke, 'Gender and Working Class Identity in Britain During the 1950s', *Journal of Social History*, 34 no.4 (2001), 773-795 (p.776).
[194] Brooke, pp.783-784.

> In this process [of rejecting feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness] the boy not only claims for himself the activity represented by men and father. At the same time he steps beyond the passivity of his infantile relationship to the mother and beyond his overall sense of passivity. He embraces the project of controlling himself and controlling the world. He comes to personify activity. Masculinity is a reaction against passivity and powerlessness and with it comes a repression of all the desires and traits that a given society defines as negatively passive or as resonant of passive experiences. The girl, on the other hand, discovers she will never possess men's power, and henceforth the most she can aspire to is to be loved by a man-that is, to actively pursue a passive aim.[195]

Providing that we accept that gender roles in a patriarchal society are a particular way of transcending the impotency of childhood, then it can be said that Pinter's depiction of domestic subjugation becomes more credible. Indeed, as Kaufman suggests, women in a patriarchal society are unable to achieve a sense of independence and autonomy, as the world at large implicitly tells them that security only arises through emotional dependence on a man. If we construe this dynamic in psycho-political terms, then the resultant situation is similar to what Pinter depicted, as an emotionally insecure and immature woman would find the role of housewife a means to find love through servitude. Consequently, as Pinter intimates, it is possible for the insidious domestic power relations to be constituted and maintained by a patriarchal society that

[195] Kaufmann, p.11.

does not permit women to develop confidence in their own potential for autonomy and for authentic living.

Nevertheless, with all this having been said, it would be inaccurate to claim that Pinter, from a psychological point of view, provided an undistorted depiction of the predicament of women like Rose. One criticism that comes particularly to mind is that Pinter omits the role of the mother in Rose's life, thus suggesting that women, in a maternal capacity, play no fundamental role in establishing an individual's secure feeling of authentic selfhood. From a psychoanalytical point of view, this omission is a grave one, as Winnicott, for one, stressed, with a tireless persistence, how essential a role the mother plays in the child's psychological development, and yet Pinter seems to transfer the onus of this loving care solely onto 'crippled' men, who know how to intimidate but not how to love.

Pinter's refusal to engage with the maternal element in Rose's life makes her a singular case, but this does not mean that the 'illness' she suffers from is so unusual that it cannot, from a psycho-political perspective, be taken as representative in some way. Consider, for example, Masud Khan's amendment of the Winnicottian view, which proposes that inauthenticity is caused by a series of insidious impingements on the developing self over the course of the individual's childhood and adolescence. He called this phenomenon 'cumulative trauma', describing its cause as follows:

> My argument is that cumulative trauma is the result of the breaches in the mother's role as a protective shield over the course of the whole child's development from infancy to adolescence–that is to say, in all those areas of

> experience where the child continues to need his mother as an auxiliary ego to support his immature and unstable ego-functions.[196]

If we accept what Khan is proposing here (i.e., that the child's true self–its ego– does not achieve a secure form of existential security unless it is supported by a parental figure over the course of their formative years), and we couple it with Kaufman's suggestion that young girls, in a patriarchal society, are given the implicit message that they must continually seek protection from men, who, in their quest for dominance and power, can never in reality provide them with emotional nourishment, then it follows that women can have a prolonged need to have a 'protective shield'. More fully, irrespective of how much their mothers have emotionally supported them in their earliest years, women can still be seeking as adults a protective shield and for others to be an auxiliary ego, because patriarchal society encourages, in the adolescent years, a transfer of dependence from mother to a potential husband, as it fails to provide the facilitative conditions that nurture the development of their own authentic selves. Viewed this way, Rose may indeed be an acute case, due to the extent of her emotional deprivation, but she still possesses a representative quality, as her dependence shows how much women may condone domestic tyranny in their search for emotional nourishment, and for a loving, nurturing space that would allow them to become their own authentic selves.

The Caretaker

In his speech at Bristol University, Pinter made one of the most significant and characteristic remarks of his career when he attacked the view that his plays imply that people are unable to communicate:

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[196] Masud Khan, 'The Concept of Cumulative Trauma' in *The Privacy of the Self* (London: Karnac, 1996), pp.42-58 (p.46).

> We have heard many times that tired, grimy phrase: 'Failure of communication'…and this phrase has been fixed to my work quite consistently. I believe the contrary. I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is a continual evasion, desperate rearguard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone's life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility.[197]

In this passage, Pinter reminds his audience that communication does indeed take place, even if the conversations are edgy, ambiguous, and, in a word, 'Pinteresque'. His main point is that his characters do inadvertently communicate with each other, as they desperately try to hide their vulnerabilities, but it is their shiftiness that undermines and exposes them. Pinter's characters therefore crave for the kind of power that 'keeps the other in its place', as such power (so it is hoped) prevents others from unmasking one's presentational self in order to expose an unenviable image.

Nevertheless, Pinter's rebuttal must be tempered with a reminder that his characters are not always seeking to evade others. A more accurate description of their interpersonal style would be that they, dramatically speaking, play a game of 'hide and seek', which involves making a guarded advance towards others within a pervasive atmosphere of distrust; after all, they reason that people's motivations are not always intelligible, and social niceties are often a front for barbarous instincts. More fully, whilst Pinter's characters long to be secure, to belong and to be esteemed,

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[197] *Plays 1*, p.xiii.

they can only satisfy these needs, so they believe, if they adopt an oblique, manipulative style that is both camouflage and armour. Their essential problem is that these intransigent traits of wariness and coerciveness are self-defeating, as this interpersonal style precludes genuine feelings of love and appreciation from flourishing. To put it bluntly, even Pinter's most powerful and 'successful' characters only ever win a battle, which never amounts to fostering a community.

Perhaps the most obvious, and characteristic, way that this tragic failure to connect is shown in a Pinter play is through the battle over territory. Indeed, unable to integrate into a larger world that both frightens and compromises them, Pinter's characters seek to create a private domain, an extended sphere of influence, where they try to both win the 'battle' and satisfy their basic interpersonal needs. Yet in reality this territorial imperative only leads to hatred and conflict, which precludes receiving the love and the esteem that they so much need. In Pinter's world, the wish to become director of one's own private stage is what sets those living together against one another, making it a battle for territory that is, at root, a primal confrontation.

In this section, I wish to offer a close reading of Pinter's play, *The Caretaker*, as I believe that it explores, more than any of his other works, how the territorial imperative can be a defensive means to try and satisfy the need for safety, for love and for esteem. This is because in this play these three men want to claim ownership of the dilapidated room as much as they want to connect with one another, but the battle over territory prevents any lasting bond from being formed, such that its tragic ending constitutes a collective failure. Indeed, although the tramp, Davies, is evicted at the conclusion of the play, due to his deceitful, selfish and prejudicial

behaviour, the playwright suggests that all three men are responsible for failing to be their 'brother's keeper'.

I will preface my close reading of this play with a brief account of Winnicott's seminal concept of the transitional space, as this key idea can provide a cogent explanation for why Pinter's characters are such territorial, insular creatures that can barely accommodate other people in their rooms. In particular, I will argue that, although one's home is a phantasmal construction, Pinter's characters represent a developmental impasse, as they abide in this transitional space to the point of indulgence, since they wish to be sheltered from reality, which is why they cling to their delusions as much as they defend their territories; indeed, I seek to show that each character erects a pathological transitional space, which serves as a desperate attempt to satisfy, through the distortive means of phantasy, some of their most basic needs.

I

In my earlier discussion of *The Room*, I referred to Bachelard's description of the tenant as a 'sheltered being', who lives in a protected space, which is also a phantasmal construction. According to Bachelard, the sheltered being constructs a protective space both out of what is objectively found and what is attributed to it through phantasy:

> In the most interminable of dialectics, the sheltered being gives perceptible limits to his shelter. He experiences the house in its reality and in its virtuality, by means of thoughts and dreams.[198]

[198] Bachelard, p.27.

For Bachelard, home is a space forged out of the dialectic of reality meeting phantasy, as he intimates that this need to give 'perceptible limits to [one's] shelter' expresses a need that is, in essence, an existential necessity. More fully, to be sheltered, to feel that this space is one's home, is to be protected from the pains of absolute estrangement, as we, as human beings, would otherwise confront a world that assumes a strange and hostile face. In fact, we cannot live for long without having a place as home, otherwise the radical divide between ourselves and the world creates a separation anxiety that is too acute to bear. We are, after all, creatures that began our lives as sheltered beings, and we venture out into the world with the expectation that we can find another protective space.

If it is indeed the case that there is an existential need to find shelter, as Bachelard, for one, suggests, then it would seem that the territorial imperative is a drive that is so pressing that it can override many other considerations; in other words, the need to find a home can be construed as so powerful a need that the most meagre of spaces will be appropriated for this end, even if it is an affront to one's dignity. In particular, at its most destructive, the territorial imperative can assume a demoniac quality, where it dominates the psyche and speaks in a cacophonous voice; this is an indication of an unbalanced person, such as a Rose Hudd, who has literally entrapped themselves through their overvaluation of security and their despair over their needs not being readily satisfied. In his book, *Metamorphosis*, psychoanalyst Ernest G. Schachtel elaborates on this point through his discussion of the dialectic between what he calls embeddedness-affect and activity-affect:

> The decisive difference between these two types of affect is that one is characterised by helpless distress (embeddedness-affect), the other by active

> coping with a drive tension or by active relating to the environment (activity-affect). They represent two different ways of dealing with the separation from the intrauterine situation of continuous supply and shelter. One implies basically a wish for the return to this stage or frustration, anger, impotence that such a return is not possible; the other represents the adaptation to the new, separate form of existence.[199]

Schachtel contends that human beings embody and express two contrary tendencies, where one (embeddedness affects) is a sign of resignation, as it seeks to regress to a point of insular, womb-like security and easy gratification; the other (activity affects) is a potentiating force, as it encourages the person to explore the world and to satisfy their needs.

Although Schachtel does not explicitly discuss the pathological form of territorial imperative, the parallel is nevertheless easy to establish, as this kind of imperative is driven by embeddedness-affects (e.g., anxiety and resignation). For such a person, home is a second-best womb, where one retreats from a seemingly harsh, unyielding world, only to try in vain to satisfy one's needs through the quick, but distortive means of phantasy. Indeed, this refusal to engage with the larger world implies that there is not only a rejection of forever-encroaching reality, but also that of the wider community; such a person, in other words, is burdened by their obsessions, as they hide in their burrow, too afraid to peek out and engage with life.

This 'type' description, in general, fits well with the typical Pinter character, as they are driven by a pathological territorial imperative that involves colonising a space, and shutting out the harsh and frightening world outside. As I will show in my

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[199] Ernest G. Schachtel, *Metamorphosis: On the Conflict of Human Development and the Psychology of Creativity*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2013), p.29.

close reading, this pathological trend is explored in-depth in *The Caretaker*, as the essential conflict is not simply over territory; rather, what divides them is the question of who gets to create a phantasmal space that suits their particular neurotic requirements.

Considering now Winnicott's theory of the transitional (or potential) space, this key idea explains how a phantasmal space can be constructed, and more importantly, how it can become a prison with invisible bars. In his paper on 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena', Winnicott makes his essential statement on what he means by the transitional space:

> From birth… the human being is concerned with the problem of the relationship between what is objectively perceived and what is subjectively conceived of, and in the solution of this problem there is no health for the human being who has not started off well enough by the mother. *The intermediate area to which I am referring is the area that is allowed to the infant between primary creativity and objective perception based on reality testing*. The transitional phenomena represent the early stages of the use of illusion, without which there would be no meaning for the human being in the idea of a relationship with an object that is perceived by others as external to that being.[200]

Evidently Winnicott views human development as a gradual movement from the stage of omnipotence (where the infant believes that his phantasy *is* reality) to the stage of

[200] 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena' in *Playing and Reality*, pp.1-25 (p.15).

objective apperception, where the world can be apprehended in its ‘realness’ without it seeming to be a forbidding, pleasure-denying realm. For Winnicott, then, human maturation depends, as it did for Freud, upon a balance between the Pleasure and Reality principles; where he differs, though, from his predecessor is that he stresses the importance of creatively constructing a personal meaning in the world. The reason why Winnicott makes this amendment is that, in his opinion, the Reality principle must indeed be accepted, but with the following crucial reservation: reality must not become our master, forcing us to capitulate to a world that is too radically divorced from our inner pleasure-dominated life.

Winnicott proposes in his writings that the creative resolution of those two titanic principles of mental life is possible because there exists a third ‘habitat’, which is neither exclusively inner nor outer, but a fusion of the ‘created’ and of the ‘found’. This realm he terms the intermediate area (the transitional space), mainly as a reminder of its original purpose in the first phases of development, since this potential space originally arises as a means of using illusion to endow the world with a personal meaning. More specifically, as Winnicott intimates in the above quote, if the human being were not able to creatively appropriate what it has objectively found (that is, if it were not able to integrate the world into his inner life), then there would be no incentive to further explore the rich diversity of the outer world. Winnicott therefore makes clear that the transitional space represents, at first, a transitional phase, where the infant has relinquished the pleasures of primary creativity (that is, the period where the world entirely seems the creation of one’s phantasies), but has not yet established the ability to fully reality test. At this point, the transitional space is a ‘place’ where the individual can rest, or lie fallow, as it allows the person to begin apprehending the objective world without it assuming an alien aspect. In other words,

the transitional space acts as a shelter, a 'place' where the richness and the variety of the objective world can be somewhat discerned without the realness becoming so intrusive and overwhelming that it is difficult for the individual to incorporate it into their inner life. As Winnicott himself describes it, the transitional area exists at all subsequent stages of life as a 'resting place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate and yet inter-related'[201]; indeed, the 'recuperative' qualities of the transitional space are due to it being, literally or figuratively, an arena of play, where phantasy can temper, yet not entirely exclude, the 'real' world.

Since the transitional space is a 'place' to linger, a way of keeping outer and inner reality separate, yet inter-related, what is important, in terms of the present discussion, is to stress that there is a danger that an individual will remain there for too long. In these cases, such a pathological use of the transitional area constitutes a retreat from the objective, communal world, which means in essence that one's phantasies are no longer subject to creative development; instead, they become fixed delusions, which are a way of keeping an alienating reality at bay. James M. Glass expresses it this way:

> To remain in the intermediate area of illusion becomes a 'special indulgence', tolerable for the infant but pathological for the adult-Narcissus, for example, riveted to his image in the pool. The pathological illusion ('narcissism')

[201] *Playing and Reality*, p.3.

> prevents movement toward or engagement with external reality; it eventually encases the self and becomes elaborated as delusional presence.[202]

What Glass intimates here is that to remain for too long in the transitional area implies that an individual exists within a delusional, hermetic world that ultimately is a reflection of their own unmet needs and their own exaggerated ideas and ideals. In this case, what is lacking is what could be termed a form of existential confidence, which Winnicott describes in the following passage as being based upon the world being seen as capable of partnering with one's phantasies:

> I am claiming that every baby has his or her own favourable or unfavourable experience here. Dependence is maximal. The potential space happens only in relation to a feeling of confidence on the part of the baby, that is, confidence related to the dependability of the mother figure or environmental elements, confidence being the evidence of dependability that is becoming introjected.[203]

Although Winnicott is discussing the establishment of that foundational sense of confidence, his remarks nevertheless pertain to the later stages of life too, as an individual will be capable of engaging with the external world if he feels that the 'found' (that element that he discovers out with his own subjectivity) does exist and that it is dependable and amenable enough to be incorporated into his inner life. This form of existential confidence is therefore developed or undermined depending upon how much the individual at any point in their life feels that the world is an answering reply to their innermost needs.

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[202] Glass, p.184.
[203] 'The Location of Cultural Experience' in *Playing and Reality*, pp.95-103 (p.135).

It is worthwhile to explicate this idea of existential confidence more fully, as it will explain this notion of the pathological use of the transitional space. Winnicott, in his writings, acknowledged that the transitional space is the 'place where we live'[204], which was his way of describing, in his occasional poetic style, the idea that this intermediate area is where we are 'at-home' in the world. His reasoning behind this memorable statement was that the transitional space is the 'place' where the individual can render the objective world personally meaningful by creatively fusing it with the richness of his inner life; furthermore, it is also a 'shelter', where one can linger before 'venturing out' into wider engagement with the objective world.

Nevertheless, it is also true that one's potential space, otherwise known as one's home, can assume a negative, imprisoning form, as it can become a place of indefinite refuge. In the latter case, this occurs when the individual's basic needs cannot be readily met by the outside world, and so, in fear and despair, he turns away from that inhospitable reality. One's home therefore becomes an edifice of denial, a phantasmal Band-Aid of sorts that is intended to cover over or efface the divisive split between self and outer world, when in reality it only deepens one's delusions and isolates the individual from communal living. Thus, such a home is not 'merely' an individual's territory, which has to be defended because it is a part of physical space that provides shelter and is one's own abode; instead, the individual feels that he must jealously guard and protect it because it constitutes a shelter from the threat of nakedly confronting an inhospitable, alienating world that provides, so it seems, little solace and satisfaction for one's own frustrated needs, desires and dreams. In reality, though, this inability to reside temporarily and intermittently in the transitional space signifies that the phantasmal world is no longer defined by the imaginative

[204] 'The Place Where We Live' in *Playing and Reality*, pp.104-110 (p.104).

possibilities of ‘as if’; rather, such individuals are caught in a community-defying situation where phantasy has begun to assume the obstinacy and fixity of fact.

In the following section, it will become clear that all of the characters in *The Caretaker* are, in their respective ways, neurotically impelled by a territorial imperative that involves a pathological use of the potential space. Briefly, what I intend to show is that, whilst Mick desires, with quiet desperation, to provide the room with a ‘make-over’ so that he can deny that his life consists only of small accomplishments punctuated by grandiose, unrealisable plans, Aston intends to make his room into a little self-sufficient world, where he need no longer depend upon a world that committed him to a mental institution. As for Davies, he too treats the room as an inflexibly constructed phantasmal space, as the house is to become, so he hopes, his own bourgeois sanctuary, where he can sit in his lounge wearing his smoking jacket; indeed, the room will shelter him from the fact that, as much as he might protest otherwise, his identity papers are all in order, and he is, in the eyes of society, nothing but a work-shy tramp.

II

Unlike many of Pinter’s ‘room’ plays, *The Caretaker* begins with an act of kindness: an aged tramp is invited, without much ceremony, into Aston’s home after a fight broke out at a local cafe. Such generosity, and above all else, such trust is indeed unusual in a Pinter play, as ‘visitors’ are nearly always treated as intruders, who intend, once they get comfortable, to displace the tenant from his room. For those acquainted with Pinter’s dramatic world, it is very difficult to believe that this opening actually heralds the beginning of a friendship between two lonely misfits.

This pessimistic prognosis is confirmed once we hear more from Davies and how he came to be invited into this room. Once Aston settles down and tries to fix a

toaster, Davies replays his own self-serving version of what happened at the café, and what becomes obvious is that the tramp is an argumentative skiver, who is enlivened by his own hostility and by his own misbegotten sense of entitlement. For Davies, the fight may have been messy, perhaps even life threatening, but, in the comfort of Aston's abode, all that lives on is his indignation and his resentment over a Scotsman, of a similar rank as himself, 'ordering' him to take out a bucket. Somewhat ominously, he admits, with a degree of impatience, that even if it were his duty, he would only allow his boss to tell him what to do:

> Yes, well say I had [to take out the bucket]! Even if I had! Even if I was supposed to take out the bucket, who was this git to come up and give me orders? We got the same standing. He's not my boss. He's nothing superior to me.[205]

What Davies is unwilling to admit to himself is that he was disinclined to take the bucket out, because he does not like fulfilling his work responsibilities, and he suffers from a thinly veiled sense of entitlement that encourages him to only capitulate to those with actual power. According to the psychoanalyst and character 'anatomist', Karen Horney, this combative, hierarchal mentality is typical of the arrogant-vindictive character's worldview:

[205] Pinter, *The Caretaker*, 2nd edn (London: Faber, 2000) p.5.

> He feels that the world is an arena where, in the Darwinian sense, only the fittest survive and the strong annihilate the weak…A callous pursuit of self-interest is the paramount law.[206]

The incident at the café underscores Horney's description of the type, as Davies feels not so much exploited by his position in society as misidentified: as the debacle with the Scotsman shows, he 'pounces' when someone conflicts with his own private 'religion', which puts him on a self-worshipping pedestal. Of course, this need-to-triumph attitude is a logical outgrowth of his arrogant-vindictive temperament, as he encounters the world with poised and venomous fangs that are ready to avenge anyone that makes him feel weak or a 'nobody', thus 'proving' his own strength and superiority. Such a man is therefore incapable of forming close attachments, and honouring obligations, as these are construed as coercive ploys that are intended to derail one's singled-minded focus on achieving the 'prizes' that vindicate his otherwise sorry existence. In the case of Aston, he might as well have invited a feral cat in for company, as Davies is an aggressive and exploitative loner, who is only looking for opportunities, and who will heed only threats.

One of those 'opportunities' soon presents itself when the diffident Aston offers Davies to stay in his room until he gets himself 'fixed up'.[207] At first, Davies refuses, feigning reluctance ('[Sleep] Here? Oh I don't know about that'[208]), as he does not, as an arrogant-vindictive type, wish to be too quick to accept, since this would be an admission of weakness that would hurt his pride. Nevertheless, he does not hold out for too long, as he quickly accepts before promising Aston that he will get himself 'fixed up' at some point in the near future. At this point, it is unclear if

[206] Karen Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts* (New York: Norton, 1945), p.64.
[207] *The Caretaker*, p.16.
[208] *The Caretaker*, p.17.

Aston has any reservations about the tramp, but it is still obvious that Davies is providing a cover story that was fashioned long ago for exploitative ends. More fully, Davies informs Aston that, in order to be designated as the responsible citizen that he is, he needs to pick up his identity papers from an old friend in Sidcup; until then, he is stuck with a 'mistaken identity' and his paltry lot, which means settling for the four paltry insurance stamps associated with his 'alias':

> Jenkins. Bernard Jenkins. That's my name. That's the name I'm known by, anyway. But it's no good me going on with that name. I got no rights. I got an insurance card here.
>
> *He takes a card from his pocket.*
>
> Under the name of Jenkins. See? Bernard Jenkins. Look. It's got four stamps on it. Four of them. But I can't go along with these. That's not my real name, they'd find out, they'd have me in the nick. Four stamps. I haven't paid out pennies. I've paid out pounds. I've paid out pounds, not pennies. There's been other stamps, plenty, but they haven't put them on…[209]

These mock lamentations about 'if only the weather would break,'[210] and the talk about Sidcup are essentially stalling tactics, a way of buying time until Davies can think of some strategies that will allow him to stay in the room. Yet what is disconcerting is that Davies half-believes his own trite and implausible cover story, as he really does wish to suggest that he is not a work-shy tramp, but that he has been

[209] *The Caretaker*, p.25.
[210] *The Caretaker*, p.26.

misrepresented to the point of being misidentified i.e., underneath the ill-fitting, dirty clothes of Mac Davies/Bernard Jenkins lies the beating heart of a conscientious, hardworking citizen. In reality, though, all that Davies is doing is pathetically flirting with what he believes he *should* be, as he is, as an arrogant-vindictive type, devoted to not only an image that betrays no weaknesses (a conscientious, hard-working citizen), but also to a self-concept that acknowledges his triumphant superiority (' I've had dinner with the best'[211]). If Aston were prescient enough to recognise it, these character traits unequivocally spell disaster, as Davies avoids work if he can help it, and above all else, his inflated self-image longs to be realized, even though it can only be consolidated through exploitation. No doubt Davies is the kind of man that will hanker after the territorial appropriation of the room, as he, with his Machiavellian intentions, sees the abode as a tangible sign that he has reached his 'true' station in life.

If it could be said that Davies' execrable qualities are on display from the beginning, Aston's personal limitations, in contrast, do not seem worthy of inciting an audience's censure. This is because Aston seems to be the victim of the downtrodden Davies, as his slow wittedness, and his apparent kindness, have already been exploited by the tramp. Yet, as the play unfolds, Aston's actions refute any sentimental reading of his character, as his agenda discloses that he too has erected considerable barriers in his relationships, since he is so much more comfortable relating to things rather than people (in fact, he sometimes conflates them). For example, he moves from fixing some utensil to sorting out the tramp with some suitable shoes, as if he were dealing with the same kind of entity. Such behaviour

[211] *The Caretaker*, p.4.

suggests that the D.I.Y. spirit, so prevalent in the 1950s[212], has seeped into his very soul, infusing it with the spirit of community-denying individualism.

Perhaps the simplest explanation of Aston's social ineptness is that he has lived for a long time as a recluse, who never has had to attend, like a dutiful husband and father, to anybody else's needs; consequently, he can follow the trails carved out by his own private obsessions. Still, this explanation overlooks some deeper, less obvious reasons for his anti-social nature, as Aston is not simply, or even mainly, a creature of bad habits: he is, in fact, as territorial, and therefore as self-assertive, as the other two characters. For example, from the very beginning of the play, Aston told the tramp to 'Sit down',[213] which reveals not only his bad manners, but also that, within the boundaries of this room, it is he who must be obeyed. Later in the play, Aston's unyielding 'individualism' is even more conspicuous, as his failure to let Davies close a window shows that he could never adopt a communal way of life.

It is worth exploring further why Aston is so anti-social, and how this relates to his pathological territorial imperative. In my view, what distinguishes Aston from Davies is that the latter wants to ruthlessly seize the room and assume proprietary rights over it, whilst the former has the desire to retreat to his room and live a life, so he thinks, of almost complete self-sufficiency. Aston's behaviour and motivations are,

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[212] Writing about the home-centred life in the post-war years, Claire Langhamer mentions how men focused on tasks that were less about nurturing others, and more about fixing things:

> We have already seen that the emergence of masculine homemaking accompanied the emergence of new forms of housing. Combined with a reduction in working hours and increase in real incomes, new housing forums also encouraged an expansion of housework for men, albeit an expansion mediated by gendered discourses of appropriateness. Distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable male housework remained of real significance. So, for example, when Mass-Observation asked its panellists to describe the household jobs most preferred by men in 1948, they provided the following list: mending and fixing, carrying the coal, chopping firewood, lighting the fire, washing up, table-setting, and window cleaning.

Langhamer, p.356.

[213] *The Caretaker*, p.2.

in fact, reminiscent of Horney's 'moving away from' personality type as described by Bernard J. Paris:

> The basically detached person worships freedom and strives to be independent of both outer and inner demands. He pursues neither love nor mastery; he wants, rather, to be left alone, to have nothing expected of him and to be subject to no restrictions…He may react with anxiety to physical pressure, long-term obligations, and inexorability of time and the laws of cause and effect, traditional values and rules of behaviour, or, indeed, anything that interferes with his absolute freedom. He wants to do as he pleases, when he pleases; but, since he is alienated from his spontaneous desires, his freedom is rather empty. It is a freedom from what he feels as coercion rather than a freedom to fulfil himself.[214]

Horney proposes that this kind of character craves freedom more than anything else, but, as she also stresses, this is freedom as a neurotic conceives it, given that it is negatively defined i.e., a freedom *from* rather than a freedom to *do*.

This characterisation explains, first of all, why Aston is so bewitched by utilities, as they promise a life of self-sufficiency, and they, unlike people, never ask for anything in return, which would compromise his 'freedom'. Furthermore, Horney's description also explains why Aston is such a chronic procrastinator, who obsessively accumulates junk that serves no ostensible practical purpose, as his self-alienation only 'articulates' what he must escape from, but not what constructive and authentic goal he can definitively attain; in other words, Aston is compulsively

[214] Bernard J. Paris, *Third Force Psychology and the Study of Literature* (New Jersey: Farleigh Dickinson Press, 1986), p.51.

attached to a way of being-in-the-world that can never be realistically achieved, as there will never be a point where he feels that he has enough tools to be independent, since he is so fixated on a continual flight from dependence upon others.

Another, more in-depth way of construing this 'accumulation is all' philosophy is that Aston has constructed a pathological transitional space, which not only prevents him relating to the objective world, but it also precludes him from creatively appropriating objects into his inner life, whether they be pieces of junk or people. Consider, first of all, Winnicott's statement on what constitutes a 'good object' for the infant:

> A good object is no good to the infant unless created by the infant. Shall I say, created out of need? Yet the object must be found in order to be created. This has to be accepted as a paradox.[215]

Winnicott's description articulates the 'paradox' of creative and authentic living, as the object (whatever that may be) has to be *found*, and yet is must also be *created*. According to Winnicott, the paradox is resolved when the object is construed as an 'answer' to the individual's inner, true self needs, as this means that it is both found and created, since it constitutes an intermingling of the objective and the subjective. In the case of Aston, then, the existential problem with his neurotic freedom is that he can only accumulate objects rather than creatively assimilate them, as the objects that he finds, and brings back to his room, cannot be dynamically incorporated into his inner life, since he is only interested in quantity rather than in their qualities, due to him being alienated from his spontaneous desires. This therefore explains why his

[215] Winnicott, 'Communicating and Not Communicating Leading to a Study of Certain Opposites' in *Maturational Processes*, pp.179-192 (p.181).

territorial imperative constitutes a utilitarian, and essentially uninterested approach to others, as he incorporates, for example, the tramp into his room, but only as a piece of junk that needs to be fixed so that it might come in handy at a future date. In essence, Aston's room is an 'introjective' space, as there is an accumulation of stuff without any attempt to creatively transform their properties.

If it is indeed the case that these two men were doomed from the beginning from becoming friends, then Mick's appearance in the second act only serves to undermine even further this tenuous acquaintanceship. Yet from Mick's point of view the dissolution of their relationship constitutes no tragedy, as he, as self-appointed 'caretaker' of his brother, wishes to protect Aston from rogues like Davies. Mick's caution and suspiciousness is no doubt a consequence of him being all too aware that his slow-witted brother is open to exploitation, and that nobody would befriend the reclusive Aston without some hidden agenda. Appropriately enough, as Mick tackles the tramp to the ground, his first words to Davies are, 'What's the game?'[216] as his abrasive demand for honesty shows how keen he is to find out the tramp's intentions.

Since Mick pins the tramp down, brashly asking what he is 'playing at', it might be expected that he will remove Davies immediately from the room. This is not what happens, however, as the direct approach morphs into something more oblique, since Mick indulges his malicious streak by digressing at great length about several people who were apparently the 'spitting image'[217] of the tramp. Such talk confuses Davies, understandably enough, but he nevertheless realises that Mick is issuing a warning to the effect of, 'I know your type'. Indeed, on an animal-like level, Davies intuits that this strange and domineering man is playing cat and mouse.

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[216] *The Caretaker*, p.42.
[217] *The Caretaker*, p.45.

After Mick performs his opening gambit, what could be called the politics of the room becomes clearer, as Mick's 'old scoundrel' is not thrown out of the house. This puzzling 'charitable' act is never explained in the play, giving rise to several competing explanations: on the one hand, Mick may not actually possess the authority to evict Davies, as Aston could be the owner. On the other hand, Mick may, in fact, be the landlord, but he does not want to be blamed by Aston for evicting what the latter might construe as a possible companion; this explanation is a more complex and compelling one, as it acknowledges that Mick is, in his indirect way, his brother's keeper (or caretaker). Whatever the reason, Mick decides to proceed in an Iago-like fashion, which implies that, in the meantime, Davies' position within the room appears to be secure.

Given that Mick must make a tactical concession to Davies, this requires him to exploit the fatal flaws of Davies' character, so that the tramp falls prey to his own weaknesses. After playing his malicious prank on Davies involving a vacuum cleaner, he sits down with the tramp and asks, with mock sincerity, for his advice:

> Uuh…listen…can I ask your advice? I mean you're a man of the world. Can I ask your advice about something?
>
> DAVIES: You go right ahead.
>
> MICK: Well, what it is, you see, I'm…I'm a bit worried about my brother.[218]

What Mick discusses here are some legitimate concerns of his (he is, no doubt, worried about Aston's 'inwardness'), but he raises them with the tramp only for strategic reasons. What underlies his approach is a clear-eyed awareness that Davies

[218] *The Caretaker*, p.76.

is a typical opportunist, who will uncritically accept any proposal that advances his position and flatters his not inconsiderable ego. Before offering this proposal, Mick primes his unsuspecting victim by pretending to 'confide' in the tramp that he believes his brother to be a 'slow worker', as the interior-decorating job he 'assigned' Aston has not been completed:

> He's supposed to be doing a little job for me…I keep him here to do a little job…but I don't know…I'm coming to the conclusion he is a slow worker.[219]

Even though it is impossible to determine whether Mick did assign such a job, the main point is that Davies believes Mick is changing allegiances, and that there is therefore an opportunity to insinuate himself into the power structures that govern the room. Consequently, when Mick makes the proposal of offering Davies the job of caretaker, the tramp, true to form, focuses on his gain in status, even if it means overlooking the fact that he has displaced Aston from doing work that was originally his job to do. As Mick expected, the rupture in Davies' relationship with his brother has already begun, as the only thing that this ruthless character is interested in is making sure that Mick is the 'boss':

> DAVIES: Yes, well…look…listen…who's the landlord here, him or you?
>
> MICK: Me. I am. I got the deeds to prove it.
>
> DAVIES: Ah…
>
> *Decisively.*

[219] *The Caretaker*, p.79.

> Well listen, I don't mind doing a bit of caretaking, I wouldn't mind looking after the place for you.[220]

Davies' behaviour soon changes after his 'promotion' to the role of caretaker, as the tramp no longer feels that he needs to show Aston, his 'inferior', any gratitude. This is quite apparent when Aston hands him a bag of clothes that he had bought for the tramp:

> DAVIES *takes two check shirts, bright red and bright green, from the bag. He holds them up.*
>
> Check.
>
> ASTON: Yes.
>
> DAVIES: Yes…well, I know about these sort of shirts, you see. Shirts like these, they don't go far in the wintertime. I mean that's one thing I know for a fact. No, what I need, is a kind of shirt with stripes, a good solid shirt, with stripes going down. That's what I want.[221]
>
> .

This last statement is a bold and brazen remark from someone who relies on charity, as Davies now feels, as the 'caretaker', that he is entitled to tell Aston what he wants, and be dismissive of anything that does not match his standards. It comes as no surprise, then, that the only piece of clothing that catches Davies' fancy is a smoking jacket, as it signifies, for him, his upwardly mobile lifestyle:

> *He takes from the bag a deep-red velvet smoking jacket.*

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[220] *The Caretaker*, p.82.
[221] *The Caretaker*, p.64.

What's this?

ASTON: It's a smoking jacket.

DAVIES: A smoking jacket?

He feels it.

This ain't a bad piece of cloth. I'll see how it fits.

He tries it on.

You ain't got a mirror here, have you?

ASTON: I don't think I have.

DAVIES: Well, it don't fit too bad. How do you think it looks?

ASTON: Looks all right.

DAVIES: Well, I won't say no to this, then.

ASTON *picks up the plug and examines it.*

No, I wouldn't say no to this.[222]

Pinter presents, at this juncture, an excellent example of dramatic irony, as Davies' choice of the smoking jacket is a preposterous fit for someone so badly dressed and so inopportunely placed in the world. Still, from the tramp's perspective, it makes perfect sense, as he imagines that his recent promotion means that he is only one step away from obtaining the prize of being the owner of the room. Indeed, as delusional and as self-aggrandising as Davies' perspective is, his dreams capture, in a carnival-mirror kind of the way, the spirit of the age. As Langhamer explains, the post-war period was well-known for its 'lust' for home ownership, as there was the implicit belief that the ruinous, slum-ridden past could be transformed anew, thereby making way for a more affluent and self-determining lifestyle:

[222] *The Caretaker*, pp.64-65.

> Certainly a cross-class dream of attaining a 'home of one's own' was not new to the post-war period: it had a persuasive appeal for middle- and working–class men and women able to rent or buy homes beyond the slum conditions of inner city life in the years up to the second world war as well as beyond. In the years before and after the war, the dream became a reality for ever-growing numbers. Four million new homes were built during the interwar period, of which 1.5 million were state-funded: the post-war government presided over the building of 900,000 new houses and by 1957, 2.5 million flats and homes had been constructed, the majority by local authorities. Large-scale slum clearance schemes and the development of new estates actively changed both the physical environment of home and the meanings invested in home and community life.[223]

According to Langhamer, the post-war ideology was that the state, like some great benefactor, would provide, and that the populace could, with sufficient funds, own a property. Viewed in this light, Davies' expectations are, to some extent, a parodic version of this attitude, as the tramp expects a property to be available, and he, like the slum dwellers, believes that he has arisen from the ashes, as it were, by being transformed into one of the home-owning class.

Despite these superficial similarities, the tramp's attitude is still of the pathological kind, as he suffers from a 'redemptive' territorial imperative, since he believes that being the caretaker of the house will satisfy his desperate need for self-esteem, and his deep-seated desire to triumph over his own perceived impotence.

[223] Langhamer, pp.347-348.

Davies is indeed playing, none too subtly, the 'topdog' game, as his neurotic compulsions demand a space where he has 'divided and conquered'. In the case of Aston's room, it has become, in phantasmal terms, a confirmatory place, as it is decked out in the garb of Davies' own delusional needs.

To consider this more fully, what this means is that Davies, firmly ensconced in a room, has regressed to what Glass calls a 'delusional reading of reality', as he has little sense of actuality, given that he is enslaved to a flattering, but unreal self-image. Glass describes this process as follows:

> This competition among closed systems of belief, delusional readings of reality, and acceptance…of external reality constantly repeats itself. It is always an effort to avoid moving backward into solipsism and the re-enactment of infantile omnipotence as enslavement to a perverse ego ideal.[224]

Davies' life is defined by an insidious gulf between reality and wish, as his ego ideal counsels him to be the triumphant aggressor, who drinks the 'cream' of life, whilst he wanders aimlessly in clothes that are not much better than reformed rags. In fact, it is only in a space that is hermetically sealed off from a disconfirming and disillusioning reality that Davies can achieve some status and believe, in his delusional way, that he is about to achieve what his ego ideal insists upon. What he cannot appreciate, of course, is that his ego ideal only leads him into conflict with others, as the quest for its fulfilment is predicated upon adopting an arrogant, callous and exploitative attitude. In concrete terms, what this implies is that his 'promotion' to 'caretaker', and his alignment with the supposed 'topdog' position, will create conflict with the only other

[224] Glass, p.179.

man that he shares the room with, namely Aston. Little does Davies know that such arrogance will contribute to his eventual eviction, as he will make the tragic miscalculation of believing that Mick careens through life upholding the same philosophy as he has, namely to give preferential treatment to those who are of most use to him. Characteristically, he overlooks the one constant in this otherwise precarious situation: Mick's love and concern for his brother.

Undeniably, Davies is the most callous and egocentric of the three men, but, as the play progresses, Aston's own selfishness begins to rear its ugly head, making life more difficult in the room than it need be. This is because Aston is a 'lone wolf', a man who, in seeking freedom from 'constraints', finds it almost impossible to honour obligations. One example of this neurotic fear of being trapped by another's needs is when Davies implores Aston to close the window, as the rain is soaking him during the night:

> Yes, but listen, you don't know what I'm telling you. That bloody rain, man, come right in on my head, spoils my sleep. I could catch my death of cold with it, with that draught. That's all I'm saying. Just shut that window and no one's going to catch any colds, that's all I'm saying.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> ASTON: I couldn't sleep in here without that window open.[225]

This example shows that Aston's preferences are implicit demands, as he exemplifies an attitude of veiled disdain to what other people want. What therefore occupies his

[225] *The Caretaker*, p.86.

attention is his own self-defined ‘projects’ (if his procrastinating actions can indeed be called this), even if he has been contracted by Mick to do some interior decorating:

> ASTON: Yes. I’m supposed to be decorating this landing for him. Make a flat out of it.
>
> DAVIES: What does he do, then?
>
> ASTON: He’s in the building trade. He’s got his own van.
>
> DAVIES: He don’t live here, do he?
>
> ASTON: Once I get that shed up outside…I’ll be able to give a bit more thought to the flat, you see…[226]

Aston is clearly a passive aggressive character, as he expresses his own needs through indirectly attempting to thwart those in conflict with his own. In some respects, he is dissimilar to the tramp, as he does not, like Davies, need people as people, since his own brand of defensive relating is implicitly stamped all over the junk that crowds the room. At one point in the play he unwittingly offers an explanation for why he objectifies others, and why, to put it bluntly, he no longer ‘bothers’ with people:

> But I don’t talk to people now. I steer clear of places like that café. I never go into them now. I don’t talk to anyone…like that. I’ve often thought of going back and trying to find the man who did that to me [gave him electroshock]. But I want to do something first. I want to build that shed out in the garden.[227]

[226] *The Caretaker*, p.62.
[227] *The Caretaker*, p.92.

Aston's long monologue is a curious tale about his wilful disconnection from others. Indeed, the tragic subtext of his tale is that his befriending of Davies constitutes his first tentative attempt at forging a connection with another, since his traumatic psychiatric treatment. Previously, Aston, due to his embeddedness-affect of pervasive fear, had redirected his social needs into pipedream projects, but, with the appearance of the tramp, he now makes a rare attempt to have another bear witness to his confusion and pain.

Unfortunately, this 'reaching out' is complicated by a number of undermining factors, however. Firstly, Davies is an unsuitable audience for this kind of revelatory narrative, as Aston's difficulties would be interpreted as a disclosure of weaknesses, which he could then exploit. Secondly, Aston's attempt to connect is still very much on his own terms, as he neither expects, nor desires, for his narrative to be 'opened' up through dialogue; rather, it is a monologue that is analogous to his pathological transitional space, as both are constructed to keep the tempering reality of the other at bay. Consequently, the monologue does not lead to Aston changing mental 'gears', as he still continues to treat the tramp as someone to be incorporated unresistingly into his space.

With these mounting tensions, the room becomes, in a sense, a pressure cooker, as the two men become even more determined to dominate the space. At the beginning of the third act, Davies' strategy is to try and eliminate the competition by consolidating the bond that he thinks he has with Mick. As he sits in a chair, sporting his smoking jacket, he tries to turn his 'confidante' Mick against his brother by portraying him in an unfavourable light:

> Couple of weeks ago…he sat there, he gave me a long chat…about a couple of weeks ago. A long chat he give me. Since then he ain't hardly said a word. He went on talking there…I don't know what he was…he wasn't looking at me, he wasn't talking to me, he don't care about me. He was talking to himself! That's all he worries about. I mean, you come up to me, you ask my advice, he wouldn't never do a thing like that. I mean, we don't have any conversation, you see? You can't live in the same room with someone who…who don't have any conversation with you.[228]

Davies' complaints about Aston's 'communication' problems possess some truth, but he hubristically overlooks that he too has considerable difficulties with having a 'conversation', as the tramp offloads his anger and resentment by talking at people. In reality, his actual problem with Aston is that he wants to be flattered, to be asked for advice, and above all else, to be put first, but his roommate is singularly incapable of doing this. Now that Aston is, in the tramp's opinion, the worst kind of person (i.e., a useless inconvenience) Davies feels entitled to evict, by proxy, Aston from the room. He attempts to do this by forming a clique that excludes the procrastinating D.I.Y. man, as he proposes to Mick that he should tell his brother 'that we got ideas for this place':

> No, what you want to do, you want to speak to him, see? I got…I got that worked out. You want to tell him…that we got ideas for this place, we could

[228] *The Caretaker*, p.95.

> build it up, we could get it started. You see, I could decorate it out for you, I could give you a hand in doing it…between us.[229]

With his animal-like cunning, Davies understands the value of aligning himself with the centre of power (as he imagines it to be), and he also knows that he can articulate, more than Aston ever could, the language of Mick's interior decorating dreams. Of course, underneath all this scheming is the ill-founded hope that, if he becomes a figure of absorbing interest for Mick, then Aston will be treated, like his plug-free toasters, as being surplus to requirements. What Davies still cannot appreciate, however, is that he is only a caretaker by name, whereas Mick is, in a sense, one by vocation, as he will always prioritize the needs of his naïve and reclusive brother.

In general, this ruthless, and ill-considered seizing of any 'opportunity' is typical from Davies, who always cared about assuming proprietorship of the room anyway. Now at this stage in the play, Davies no longer needs to worry about dissimulating, such as when Aston irritates him by wakening him up in the middle of the night. Disgruntled at the interruption of his sleep, Davies unleashes a callous and ultimately misguided attack on Aston, as he jeers at him for being in a 'nuthouse'[230], and he makes the deeply ironic threat that his roommate should learn to 'keep his place':

> So don't you start mucking me about. I'll be all right as long as you keep your place. Just keep your place, that's all. Because I can tell you, your brother's

[229] *The Caretaker*, p.101.
[230] *The Caretaker*, p.107.

> got his eye on you. He knows all about you. I got a friend there, don't you worry about that. I got a true pal there…[231]

If Davies possessed some moral principles, he could have gently admonished Aston for his inconsiderateness in wakening him up; instead, being the ruthless individual that he is, all that matters to him is that someone has infringed the supposed pecking order. In a tragic sense, he has indeed got a point, as there is a pecking order to be respected, but he has failed to realise that he is still at the bottom of it, even if he has been 'promised' the role of caretaker. In fact, little does he know that if he had acted as a caretaker for Aston, then both brothers would have been content for him to remain in the room. Characteristically though, Davies acts in an uncompassionate manner, and he even suggests, when Aston hints that he might need to leave, that it is he that will be the first to go:

> DAVIES: Find somewhere else?
>
> ASTON: Yes.
>
> DAVIES: Me? You talking to me? Not me, man! You!
>
> ASTON: What?
>
> ASTON: I live here. You don't.
>
> DAVIES: Don't I? Well, I live here. I've been offered a job here.[232]

Davies' incredulity betrays how his arrogance has blinded him to the stark realities of his life in the room, as he is, after his 'promotion', conceiving the space as the answer to his arrogant-vindictive phantasies of triumphing over 'inferior' others and

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[231] *The Caretaker*, p.107.
[232] *The Caretaker*, p.108.

achieving a 'high-ranking' position. For Davies, although Aston is a mere encumbrance, a fly that he has deigned to not (yet) swat, his warnings show that he believes that he can exercise his power at any point through joining forces with the 'gaffer' Mick. What Davies overlooks, amongst other things, is the possibility that Mick could take Aston's side, as they are, after all, brothers, who have some love for one another.

After the heated late-night argument between Aston and Davies, the tramp is determined, more so than ever before, to ensure that it is not he who has to leave the room. He decides to talk to his 'pal' Mick, who he hopes can come around quickly to his point of view, as he self-flatteringly believes that Mick will grant his wish on the pretext that the aspiring interior decorator needs him. In a deeply ironic reversal, however, Mick now realises that his brother is aware of what a scoundrel Davies is, and so he feels that his Machiavellian plan has been realized. Without much further ado, he dispenses with his recently hired 'caretaker', citing the bogus reason that he has just 'discovered' that the tramp has no interior decorating qualifications:

> You come here recommending yourself as an interior decorator, whereupon I take you on, and what happens? You make a long speech about all the references you've got down at Sidcup, and what happens? I haven't noticed you go down to Sidcup to obtain them. It's all most regrettable but it looks as though I'm compelled to pay you off for your caretaking work. Here's half a dollar.[233]

[233] *The Caretaker*, p.119.

Mick's cruel nod to their class differences ('Here's half a dollar') shows, if proof were needed, that he was never, at any point, invested in helping Davies. Yet, even if the tramp was never to be the caretaker and an interior decorator, Mick, somewhat surprisingly, feels that, while executing his nefarious plan, he was able to at least entertain the possibility that the dilapidated house could be transformed according to his (supposedly) discerning tastes. After telling the tramp to clear out, he now realises that his love for his procrastinating brother has thwarted the only real chance he had of getting any actual decorating work done. In a fit of rage at his absent brother, Mick throws Aston's beloved Buddha at the gas stove, which indirectly suggests that this ambitious man cannot, as the Eastern religions counsel, resign himself to the actualities of his existence; instead, due to his narcissistic tendencies, he has slipped from expansive overconfidence to bitterness and disillusionment. Paris believes that this is a characteristic pattern for such individuals:

> His bargain [with fate] is that if he holds onto his dreams and to his exaggerated claims for himself, life is bound to give him what he wants. Since life can never match his expectations, he feels, in his weaker moments, that it is full of tragic contradictions.[234]

While Mick was never as ruthlessly selfish as Davies, nor as stubborn and as lazy as Aston, regarding the room, his bitter attitude suggests that he had his own territorial imperative: this was to turn the property into a 'palace', which would enhance his self-esteem by proving what a good building contractor he is. All that he has done instead is build an elaborate fancy, a pathological use of the transitional space, where

[234] Bernhard J. Paris, *Imagined Human Beings: A Psychological Approach to Character and Conflict in Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p.25.

external reality was not supposed to obtrude, so that he could 'transform', in some alchemical move, the dilapidated room into a palace. What therefore distinguishes Mick from the other characters is that, near the play's conclusion, he has been able to see the reality of his situation, as he painfully acknowledges that the house, like his brother, will never come to fulfil his high expectations.

In his characteristically manipulative way, Davies' response to his dismissal is to change allegiances once again. Forcing himself upon the weary Aston, he suggests that he will now accept his roommate's original offer of becoming caretaker:

> …So I reckon that'd be the best way out of it, we swap beds, and then we could get down to what we was saying, I'd look after the place for you, I'd keep an eye on it for you, for you, like, not for the other…not for…for your brother, you see, not for him, for you, I'll be your man, you say the word, just say the word.[235]

Davies obviously does not understand the basis of emotional logic, as he cannot seem to appreciate that his cruel words and his callous chasing after a 'better' offer have caused an irreparable rupture in his relationship with Aston. His manipulative behaviour has only served to further ossify Aston's own neurotic compulsions, as his roommate is even less accommodating than he was before; a good example of this is when Aston refuses to change beds or let Davies help him build the tool shed:

> ASTON: No, I couldn't change beds.
>
> DAVIES: But you don't understand my meaning!

[235] *The Caretaker*, p.122.

ASTON: Anyway, I'm going to be busy. I've got that shed to get up. If I don't get it up now it'll never go up. Until it's up I can't get started.

DAVIES: I'll give you a hand to put up your shed, that's what I'll do!

Pause.

I'll give you a hand! We'll both put up that shed together! See? Get it done in next to no time! Do you see what I'm saying?

Pause.

ASTON: No. I can get it up myself.[236]

There is no doubt that Davies' actions are unforgivable and that to keep him on as caretaker would be to forget too easily his ruthless behaviour. Yet Aston's stubbornness, his misguided desire to want to go it alone, has not shown any signs of changing, in spite of the fact that his conduct is partly responsible for the impasse that they have now found themselves in; what he will never see is that, if he had not been so unyielding over fairly minor matters (such as closing a window), then Davies might not have sought to befriend Mick. In essence, while Aston is right to get rid of his roommate, his way of doing it (i.e., turning his back on Davies) is a worrying sign that he admits no culpability in what has happened between them; rather, he wants to deny reality and withdraw passive aggressively:

ASTON *turns back to the window.*

DAVIES: What am I going to do?

Pause.

What shall I do?

[236] *The Caretaker*, p.123.

Pause.

Where am I going to go?

Pause.[237]

Aston does not answer Davies' question, as he no longer takes any interest in the future of the tramp, as the reclusive Aston has turned his back on more than his roommate: we, the audience, can sense that he has shunned virtually all human contact with that final declarative, yet complacent gesture of rejection. The ending of this play is thus tragic, as neither of these two lonely and disaffected men realise that it was their pathological territorial imperative, their obstinate or ruthless attitude towards the proprietorship of the room that fatally undermined the possibility of developing the fragile bond between them.

III

Considering *The Caretaker* explicitly from a psycho-political angle, two interrelated readings come immediately to mind: 1) the play is an indictment of capitalism, as Pinter suggests that a society based upon the principle of competition for modestly scarce resources encourages individuals to see one another in a utilitarian, if not overtly hostile, way; 2) related to this, in those particularly persecuted by the social Darwinism of capitalism, Pinter contends that there is a tendency for them to retreat from the world of community living into a private sphere governed by the delusive logic of phantasy, as this is a despairing attempt to satisfy their otherwise unmet needs.

[237] *The Caretaker*, p.124.

Let us begin establishing these readings by firstly entertaining Michael Monahan's description of capitalism as a form of social organisation predicated upon the existence of relatively scarce resources:

> The basic features of capitalism (supply and demand, market value, diminishing returns, labour costs) all function within a context of scarce resources. As Robert Goodin points out, it is 'modest scarcity' which drives the market economy–if there were abundancy there would be no need for trade, while if there were extreme scarcity there would be little incentive to keep our contracts. Thus dominant market theories and political structures are all founded upon some notion of material scarcity.[238]

Monahan's description of relative scarcity proposes that it is the motivating force behind capitalist trade, as sellers and buyers come together to negotiate the transfer of modestly scarce resources and commodities. What Monahan does not add, however, is that scarcity itself can be construed as the social basis for antagonism between people, as scarce resources encourages individuals to compete fiercely for them. This was the view proposed by Jean-Paul Sartre:

> In pure reciprocity that which is Other than me is also the same. But in reciprocity as modified by scarcity, the same appears to us as anti-human in as far as this same man appears as radically Other–that is to say, as threatening us with death.[239]

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[238] Michael Monahan, 'Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and the Inevitability of Violence: Human Freedom in the Milieu of Scarcity', *Sartre Studies International*, 14 no.2 (2008), 48-70 (p.50).
[239] Jean-Paul Sartre, qtd in Monahan, p.50.

Sartre paints a bleak picture of what it is like to breathe in an atmosphere of scarcity, as he suggests that the absence of abundance means that each individual cannot empathically identify with others, since they are, in reality, competitors, if not enemies, who seek to deny what one needs to live. As Sartre argues, each individual must see others as radically Other, as each individual is motivated by the will-to-live, such that a competitor becomes an ally of death.

If one accepts, as Sartre and others do, that capitalism is a system founded upon modest scarcity, then from a psychodynamic perspective people are construed as being propelled by what psychologist Abraham Maslow called 'deficiency-needs' i.e., needs that are experienced as a painful lack in the organism, which are in contrast to the 'expansive', self-actualising needs . In his own work, Maslow's account of human psychology revolved around the differences between a deficiency and growth-orientation; their salient features are described in the following passage:

> Where [cognition] is primarily deficiency-motivated, it is more need-reductive, more homeostatic, more the relief of felt deficit. When behaviour is more growth-orientated, it is less need-reductive, and more a movement towards self-actualization, as it is more harmonious, more expressive, more selfless, more reality-centred.[240]

Maslow's definition implies that the 'deficiency orientation' possesses these prominent features: it creates a fundamentally antagonistic and utilitarian form of relating; it encourages safety and self-inhibition, rather than exploration and self-expression; and, most important of all, it is (more or less) reality denying, as the

[240] Abraham Maslow, *The Psychology of Science: A Reconnaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp.66-67.

external world is apprehended and evaluated according to the nature and urgency of a particular need. Overall, what Maslow is suggesting is that those who are deficiency-orientated are fundamentally motivated by a life philosophy that is based upon the perceived necessity of ownership, as what matters is securing those things, material or otherwise, that fulfil one's needs and define one's identity.

In his works, Erich Fromm defines this kind of orientation as the 'having' mode of existence, which is intimately related to the idea of a territorial imperative, as a capitalist society, with its modest scarcity, must value and legally respect the need for a private space that protects the individual's possessions. In fact, according to Fromm, the deficiency-orientation is so intimately related to the proprietary 'drive' that he posits that the 'having' mode of being-in-the-world is derived from it:

> The nature of the having mode of existence follows from the nature of private property. In this mode of existence all that matters is my acquisition of property and my unlimited right to keep what I have acquired.[241]

As Fromm contends, the 'having' mode can be summed up as, 'I own, therefore I am'. This is because, in the 'having' mode, the individual owns the possession, but the possession, in as far as it defines his identity, also *owns* him. Indeed, to give up what one owns, is to give up part of the self.

Returning to those two readings of the play, an argument can now be made for the first one (i.e., that Pinter proposes that capitalism inculcates a utilitarian form of relating). More fully, using characters who suffer from acute deficiency needs (in Davies' case, his status is the lowest possible in society, and so he craves desperately

[241] Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), pp.76-77.

to be recognised and esteemed; as for Aston, his persecution at the hands of government agencies, coupled with his underlying loneliness, implies he has a strong need for security and for companionship; lastly, Mick's entrepreneurial spirit camouflages his deep seated need to be esteemed by the bourgeois community), Pinter highlights how they are unable to form a harmonious collective, as they are incapable of seeing each other respectfully as individuals, but only as part of their respective individualistic projects. This utilitarian ethos is indeed exacerbated by the fact that they form a homosocial grouping, which consolidates and reinforces their shared weaknesses. According to Sharon Bird, this is a common feature of homosocial groupings:

> Homosocial interaction, among heterosexuals, contributes to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity norms by supporting means associated with identities that fit hegemonic ideals, while suppressing meanings associated with non-hegemonic masculine identities.[242]

As a group, they do not speak the language of emotions, nor do they, in particular, share (with one notable exception) any of their vulnerabilities with one another; on the contrary, the three of them maintain a defensive autonomy, as the others become simply a means to their respective ends. What therefore makes them so functional, in a thematic sense, as characters is that, in an already atomised society, they particularly underscore, as Pinter construes it, the pernicious 'soul' of capitalism (i.e., each individual wishes to use the other and to be ultimately defined by what they possess).

[242] Sharon Bird, 'Welcome to the Men's Club: Homosociality and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity', *Gender and Society*, 10 no.2 (1996), 120-132 (p.121).

Secondly, the psycho-political subtext of the pathological transitional space can now be understood as follows: in a society that fosters the development of deficiency needs, this prompts, in acute cases like the characters in this play, a heightened degree of embeddedness affects, which, in turn, causes a retreat to a private, indeed community-denying world. In other words, as Pinter shows in *The Caretaker*, the obverse side of the plundering and acquisitive enterprise that is capitalism is the pathological transitional space, where the proprietary drive becomes the quest for a private territory that is choreographed according to one's own delusional needs.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have considered a number of psycho-political situations that represent one of the most Pinteresque of themes, namely the territorial imperative. In this section, I wish to summarise my conclusions.

A Slight Ache was one of Pinter's earliest works, which, on an ostensible level, depicts a paranoid character, Edward, who is tormented by an elderly matchseller that stands just outside his back garden gate. Pinter's drama is so much more than this, though, as he examines the psychodynamics of the relationship between class divisions and territorial divisions. More fully, Pinter's characteristically psycho-political explanation for these social phenomena is that territorial divides are created through the psychological mechanism of projection, which tempers a raging psychical conflict by 'evacuating' the unwanted traits; indeed, this mechanism involves pinning them onto others, who represent, to some degree, the repressed characteristics. For Pinter, the existence of this projective 'mechanism' therefore explains why people can be driven by a demoniac territorial imperative that involves spatially isolating oneself from those that symbolise what has been disowned, as it is

important that the ‘carriers’ of the psychical content do not enter their territory and ‘re-infect’ them with their own ‘poison’. In the play itself, Edward’s transposition of an inner conflict into a spatial one assumed a class inflection, as the working class matchseller came to embody Edward’s fear of failure and his own self-disgust. In fact, it was only once the matchseller entered his home and was directly engaged with that Edward started to unwittingly reacquaint himself with what he had disowned, such that the class divisions blurred as the territorial distance between the two men receded. Pinter thus underscored in his psycho-political play how class divisions are false and inauthentic, like the impostor Edward, as they involve a disowning of one’s common humanity so that defensive social and physical structures can be erected to protect a ‘bunker-style’ ego.

Pinter’s first play, *The Room*, is likewise a work about territorial appropriation, as the reclusive, indeed agoraphobic, Rose, clings to her lukewarm room as a means of trying to secure love. Nevertheless, the play possesses a more representative appeal than this might otherwise suggest, as Pinter’s psycho-political question is this: why do women capitulated to a domestic power structure that exposed them continually to the threat of male violence. His counterintuitive answer is that such women are driven by a ‘self-actualising’ tendency, which is hindered and almost fatally restrained by living in a patriarchal society. More fully, Pinter’s view is that patriarchal society does not provide women with much opportunity to nurture and develop their identities, as they are treated as men’s utensils. Consequently, according to Pinter, this objectifying, loveless arrangement fails to develop any potential towards autonomy, and so women cling to the bars of their domestic prison, in the hope that a protective space emerges, which will allow the True, autonomous self to ‘incarnate’ itself. Overall, although the play is bleak in its denouement (Rose loses

forever her contact with her authentic self, Sal), Pinter indicts society rather than human nature, which raises the possibility of a more human and egalitarian relationship between the sexes.

Finally, *The Caretaker* construes the territorial imperative as a form of pathological use of the transitional space. In my earlier description of Winnicottian theory, I described how the 'healthy' transitional space is normally used as a space in which to lie fallow, to recuperate from the continual impositions of the reality principle. In this play, though, all three characters are driven by their deficiency needs, coupled with an underlying pessimism about their environment satisfying their desires. What this therefore means in the concrete is that the three characters, each in their own individual fashion, re-create the room using an inordinate degree of phantasy, which implies, in turn, a transitional space that is designed to exclude any element of reality that is deemed painful.

By means of this scenario, then, Pinter explored how the territorial imperative is more generally related to the capitalist proprietary 'drive', as the three characters breathe in an atmosphere of acute scarcity, which is conveyed by their willingness to possess or manipulate each other as though they were things. Where these characters differ from the 'norm', as it were, is by how little they engage in the wider world, and by the degree to which they treat the room as a phantasmal construction. In truth, these two factors are, of course, inter-related, as Pinter would no doubt agree that the more socially 'adjusted' individuals form a more 'moderate' transitional space, since their greater acquaintance with the wider world, and their greater confidence in securing what they need, implies that their homes will constitute a more egalitarian balance of the found and the created.

Chapter 4: Family Voices

Introduction

Steven H. Gale wrote the following about the importance of the concept of family in Pinter's work:

> Although most of the scholarly consideration given to the subject as it appears in his dramaturgy has focused on *The Homecoming* (1965), the theme of family has been a central one since his first play, *The Room* (1957), when Rose solicitously 'mothered' her husband, Bert. *The Birthday Party* (1958), *A Slight Ache* (1959), *The Caretaker* (1960), *Night School* (1960), *A Night Out* (1961), *The Collection* (1961), *The Lover* (1963), *Tea Party* (1965), *Landscape* (1968), *Night* (1969), *Silence* (1969), *Old Times* (1971), *Monologue* (1973) and *Betrayal* (1978) all deal with this subject to some extent. In fact it is difficult to find a drama by Pinter that does not take the concept into account at least in passing.[243]

Gale's extensive listing of Pinter plays certainly corroborates his claim that the playwright's works touch upon this theme again and again. There are several reasons for this, one of which is that family relationships are invested with a great deal of emotional energy, and conflicts are therefore inherently dramatic; furthermore, family relationships are also hierarchies, and therefore, as Pinter was well aware, they constitute one of the most universal of power relations.

This chapter will focus on two of Pinter's most family-centric plays, namely *Family Voices* (1981) and *The Homecoming*. Apart from the fact that these works

[243] Stephen H. Gale, 'Harold Pinter's *Family Voices* and the Concept of Family' in *Harold Pinter: You've Never Heard Such Silence*, pp.146-166 (p.146-147).

foreground the theme of family, the main reason for their inclusion is that, in my opinion, Pinter was essentially interested in the family as a patriarchal structure. More fully, these two readings concentrate on the theme of the family as the main structure in the creation and perpetuation of the 'patriarchal order'. *Family Voices*, in particular, shows the 'reigning sovereignty' of the patriarchal order by means of the fact that the 'lost' son (unnamed Voice 1) cannot achieve any degree of independence from his mother due to his emotionally 'absent' father; indeed, the play illustrates the 'sovereignty' of the patriarchal order by implying that a young man can either accede to the role of Symbolic Father or, like Voice 1, regress into the arms of the overly solicitous mother.

The Homecoming lays bare the structure of the patriarchal order by means of the dramatic repositioning of the mother-substitute, Ruth. In this work, three emasculated sons, and an emasculated father are unable (and, in the former cases, disinclined) to accede to the role of Symbolic Father, with his posited 'phallic' power; instead, Ruth is able to 'replace' the hapless Max, and she becomes patriarch-as-matriarch. What this transition reveals, in Pinter's view, is the insidious sexual politics of the patriarchal order. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, only one member of the family possesses any genuine power: the Symbolic Father, who is posited as the (temporary) guarantor of power and plenitude, because he possesses the primary signifier of that power: the phallus. Secondly, what is symptomatic of this non-egalitarian structure is that women are positioned in objectified, disempowered roles (mother and wife), which are based upon the phantasy that they signify 'lack'. In general, the singularity of Ruth's 'succession' to the family 'throne' exposes that there is a throne, and that it is ordinarily women's role to sit at the feet of it.

Family Voices and The Homecoming

Sean Homer wrote the following about what could be called the Oedipal orientation of libidinous desire:

> A materialist psychiatry interprets Oedipus as an 'ideological form', a referential axis–the invariant 'daddy-mommy-me'–around which desire is oriented, channelled and above all else domesticated.[244]

Homer's mention of the invariant axis of desire–the 'eternal daddy-mommy-me'–illustrates the importance of the family, as a power structure, in forming and domesticating desire. More specifically, what Homer means is that desire is 'triangulated', as the child finds, for the first time, that he has intense sexual feelings towards his original love-object (his mother), whilst confronting, at the same time, the regrettable and painful fact that deep in the heart of the family is also a formidable obstacle (his father). The allusion to the idea of the 'eternal daddy-mommy-me' therefore signifies that, for the rest of the individual's life, his desire will be codified by this original experience, such that any love-object/love-obstacle will be symbols for daddy and mommy.

In this section, I wish to examine Pinter's invocation, or should I say dramatization of the 'eternal daddy-mommy-me' by offering in-depth readings of *Family Voices* and of *The Homecoming*. Regarding the former, I will seek to show that Pinter explores, through the medium of this play, the theme of 'absent fathers/lost sons'. More fully, I intend to argue that in this play Pinter suggests that, if the male adult has suffered the lack of an emotionally 'present' father, then he is condemned to

[244] Sean Homer, *Fredric Jameson: Marxism, Hermeneutics, Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p.77.

a life of slavish, indeed childish dependence, which culminates, in this case, as a return to mother. Overall, Pinter shows what happens when there is a 'fault-line' in the patriarchal order, such that no son can accede to the position of Symbolic Father.

The next, more complex play depicts a homecoming of sorts too, but, in this work, it is a woman called Ruth that 'returns' to her husband's family. In this reading, I will argue that Pinter is still concerned with the Oedipal triangle, and with the issue of the patriarchal order, but what he intended to depict was the insidiousness, and, above all else, the pervasiveness of the patriarchal order. This he does by showing how a young woman can, through guile and desperation, accede to the position of matriarch in a dysfunctional and emasculated family.

My two readings will be prefaced, as usual, by a brief theoretical section, which, in this case, constitutes a short discussion of a Lacanian account of the Oedipus complex. More fully, the main reason I will be explaining a few basic Lacanian concepts (most notably, the mirror stage and castration as a 'portal' into the Symbolic realm) is that they provide a cogent explication of what happens to men when they cannot accede to the role of the Symbolic Father. This kind of explanation is indeed important when examining the aforementioned plays, because, as has been mentioned, the psycho-political subtext of these works is that they explore various ruptures in the patriarchal order, which ultimately links back to a failure to resolve the Oedipus complex.

I

The Freudian theory of the Oedipus complex is psychoanalysis' great narrative of how capricious infantile desire gives way to the demands of social norms. Indeed, for Freud, it is not only countries that can be subject to reform, but psyches too, as his

account of the Oedipus complex underscores how children modify their 'anti-social' desires. Freud describes the first stage of the complex as follows:

> At a very early stage the little boy develops an object-cathexis for his mother, and deals with his father by identifying with him. For a time, these two relationships proceed side by side, until the boy's sexual wishes in regard to his mother become more intense, and his father is perceived as an obstacle to them; from this the Oedipus complex originates. His identification with his father takes on a hostile colouring, and changes into a wish to get rid of his father in order to take his place with the mother.[245]

Freud intimates that the Oedipus complex begins with the little boy's sexual desires being channelled towards his mother (his first 'love object'), and the child developing a strong, if somewhat defensive, sense of proprietorship that makes his father into a hate figure of sorts. In this family drama, what Freud was depicting was the battle between his two main principles of psychological functioning, as the pleasure principle speaks the language of wish fulfilment, which in this case means possessing mother all to oneself; in contrast, the reality principle is embodied in the dominating presence of the father, who acts as an unyielding obstacle to the child's sexual desire and ambitions. With the family, therefore, desire is not so much strangulated, but subjected to 'triangulation', as the mother represents the merger of wish with object, whilst the father acts as a formidable hurdle.

Clearly, the Oedipal drama, as described by Freud, has no involved and complicated second act, as the 'battle' essentially goes on in the child's mind. This is

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[245] Freud, qtd in Richard Golsan's, *Rene Girard and Myth: An Introduction* (Oxford: Routledge, 2002), p.22.

because the child recognises, with an almost animal-like awareness of his safety, that the father is bigger and much more powerful, and that it would be folly to assert any challenge to the family structure. For Freud, what proves to be the most decisive element in the boy's strategic calculation is his belief that if he were to assert himself in an attempt to win his love object, then father would not only punish him, but remove what patriarchal society defines as the very guarantor of power and of potency, namely his penis. In his writings, Freud termed this fear as the threat of castration, which acts, as Tony Thwaites puts it, as a kind of foreboding sense that punishment could be imminent, unless certain actions are taken: 'For the boy, castration is a threat of something that might occur, in the future, as a punishment that can be averted by the right behaviour'.[246]

Since this threat of emasculation must be constantly entertained as a distinct possibility, the little boy realizes that, as long as he harbours sexual desires towards his mother, he is the enemy of his father. Consequently, the young boy decides that he should relinquish that particular desire, and redirect his libido towards a more 'suitable' love object. Viewed from one angle, the dissolution of the Oedipus complex thus ends on a note of defeat, as the child has indirectly admitted that the father is 'master' of the household, and that he remains the undefeated defender of his prized love-object. Yet, even at this early stage, the child understands that his initial defeat is only but a humbling first step along the road to mastery, as the Oedipal struggle is a particular case of losing the battle, only to win the war. The young boy is indeed aware that if he renounces his incestuous desires (or, more accurately, represses them), then he can begin his apprenticeship as a man-to-be, which will culminate in him embodying the symbolic role of Father in the family. Thus, the Freudian account

[246] Tony Thwaites, *Reading Freud: Psychoanalysis as Cultural Theory* (London: Sage, 1997), p.100.

of masculine development emphasises that inter-generational rivalry gives way to the prospects of succession, as the young boy acts like a patient successor to the throne. Meanwhile, of course, mother is treated by both parties as a passive and impotent object, as she may inspire sexual jealousy, but, according to patriarchal ideology, her sexual organ signifies a conspicuous 'lack' of phallic power.

If the Freudian model of the Oedipus complex described how incestuous desires are tamed and transformed, Jacques Lacan elaborated upon one of Freud's central assumptions, namely that subjectivity is shaped through subjection to the Other, which, for Lacan, means the symbolic order (i.e., the discursive 'space' known as language). For our purposes, his elaborations and amendments centre on two main theoretical proposals. Firstly, in his writings, Lacan posited the existence of a 'mirror stage', which he believed was one of the necessary preconditions for entry into the Oedipal 'triangle. More fully, according to Lacan, subjectivity is constructed through a necessary alienation from the immediacy of lived experience (he calls this the 'Real'), as it is only through the dialectic of self and object that experiences can be known and potentially transformed. The mirror stage is the first stop on the path to an established identity, as it is the originary moment when the infant is alienated from his direct experience through seeing his self represented as a specular construct. As Lacan puts it:

> The mirror stage is the symbolic matrix in which the 'I' is precipitated in a primordial form, prior to it being objectified in the dialectic of identification

> with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject.[247]

For Lacan, the mirror stage gives birth to representation, as the subject viscerally invests in a representational image, whether that be a mirror, or the mother's mobile and sensitive face. Consequently, this new ability to be 'found' in the realm of images (Lacan calls this domain the 'Imaginary') provides the subject with a seemingly cohesive identity for the first time. Furthermore, the mirror stage also heralds the beginnings of the ability to symbolise, as the formation of a self-image, no matter how initially rudimentary it is, depends on a basic awareness of 'I', 'other' and a symbolic 'placeholder' i.e., an image as a stand-in for the self. Since the Oedipal subject requires such self-awareness, combined with the capacity to cast mother and father in symbolic roles that are scripted by his desires, the mirror stage must be reached first.

The other Lacanian amendment involves a rewriting of the role of castration in the dissolution of the complex. To reiterate, according to the Freudian model, it is the anatomical differences between the sexes which provide the impetus for the boy to fantasize about the prospects of losing the very embodiment of his power and potency. Now, Lacan does agree with this to some extent, as he acknowledges that patriarchal societies do construe the penis as the site of power and of potency, and that the Father embodies, in the words of Roland Barthes, 'power, fascination, instituting authority, terror, power to castrate'.[248] But what Lacan emphasised the most was that subjectivity is firmly established through a movement from the Imaginary to the Symbolic realm, which is otherwise known as the discursive Other (i.e., language).

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[247] Jacques Lacan, qtd in Tamise Van Pelt's, *The Other Side of Desire: Lacan's Theory of Registers* (New York: State University of New York, 2000), p.35.

[248] Roland Barthes, qtd in Joke Dame's, 'Unveiled Voices: Sexual Difference and the Castrato' in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, Gary C. Thomas (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), p.41.

For Lacan, this transition occurs when the subject is 'castrated' through a gradual recognition of his own powerlessness, and so the subject alienates himself even more from the Real, and submits to the prevailing patriarchal ideology. What he gains, Lacan argues, is an ability to articulate his experience, even though the inevitable alienation from the Real means that some of that experience is repressed due to its deviance from the dominant ideology.

Since this notion of castration is central to the subsequent close analysis, I shall describe it in more detail. According to Lacan, what instigates the 'castration' is the child's dawning awareness that as much as he desires his mother, and wishes to have proprietorship over her, she is subjected to a power within the family that is greater than herself to which she must yield. In the family drama, the father plays the symbolic role of Father, as he signifies, as far as patriarchy is concerned, power, wholeness, and most importantly, the word as Law. Lacan therefore suggests that the child inevitably comes to the conclusion that his desire has to be modified in the interests of control, as what he now desires is to be the object of the mother's desire, which is known as the phallus:

> What the child wants is to become the desire of desire, to be able to satisfy the mother's desire, that is, 'to be or not to be' the object of the mother's desire. To please the mother it is necessary and sufficient to be the phallus.[249]

What Lacan means by 'to please the mother it is necessary and sufficient to be the phallus' is that the child's original sexual desire towards the mother becomes inflected by a wish for mastery, and that this 'mastery' is only achieved through a severance (or

[249] Lacan, qtd in Joel Dor's, *Introduction to the Reading of Lacan: The Unconscious Structured as a Language*, ed. Judith Feher-Gurewich (New York: Other Press, 1998), p.98.

alternatively, a castration) of the original dyadic relationship, which means, in essence, submitting to the cultural order and becoming an embodiment of the symbolic Father. Importantly, during this transition a process of symbolic substitution also occurs, as the object of the mother's desire–i.e., the phallus–becomes open to the chain of signifiers, and so the phallus becomes not simply the biological organ, but anything that represents, within patriarchal ideology, the letter of the law (Lacan terms this kind of signifier, 'The-Name-of-The-Father'). This Lacanian account thus implies that what brings the Oedipal stage to a definitive conclusion is the Subject being situated in the Symbolic realm, as the cultural order's patriarchal ideology provides a plenitude of other love objects (i.e., other women apart from mother), and a relatively coherent set of signifiers that embody the Father's authority and mastery.

II

Family Voices begins with Voice 1 speaking out from the void:

> I am having a very nice time. The weather is up and down but surprisingly warm, on the whole, more often than not. I hope you're feeling well, and not as peaky as you did, the last time I saw you. No, you didn't feel peaky, you felt perfectly well, you simply looked peaky. Do you miss me?[250]

These opening lines appear to be the beginning of a pleasant, albeit strained, letter that is being read out by an unidentified person. In reality, however, none of the players in this work are engaged in what could be called correspondence; this is a point that is expressed by Hersh Zeifman:

[250] Pinter, *Family Voices* in *Harold Pinter: Plays 4*, 2nd edition (London: Faber, 2005), p.131.

> Despite the antiphonal voices suggestive of an interchange of letters, a correspondence between son and mother, what we are in fact hearing are two separate voices which merely happen to intersect. We are not, then, dealing with a correspondence in any sense of the word: what appear to be letters are simply voiced thoughts, not written down.[251]

Zeifman indeed touches on one of the central themes of this play, as Pinter could very well have entitled it as *Family Monologues*: each character voices their yearnings, but they are never communicated to one another. Thematically speaking, it is quite straightforward to interpret this intersection of voices as implying that each member of the family has become estranged from one another, like several members of a disbanded choir now singing to different hymn sheets. This interpretation is a cogent one, at least up to a point, as the yearnings of mother and son, for example, do not correspond as they would if they had been lovers; likewise, the relationship between father and son, as we shall see, was obviously distant.

Still, no matter how much the above seems to be a quintessential Pinteresque theme, I do not believe that Pinter intended for this play to be about characters disconnected from one another, to the point of being uninterested. Although communication does not occur in this play, there is nevertheless one important, easily overlooked fact: these characters, each in the privacy of their own chambers (well, in the father's case, a glassy grave), cannot forget about one another. While it may be true that their thoughts will never be communicated, their yearnings, and even their expectations, are inextricably influenced by one another. As the play poignantly illustrates, it is impossible for them to not address one another, because, whether the

[251] Hersh Zeifman, 'Ghost Trio: Pinter's *Family Voices*' in *Critical Essays on Harold Pinter*, ed. by Stephen H. Gale (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1990),pp.156-163 (p.157).

tone is accusatory or conciliatory, obsequious or goading, they are compelled to voice their thoughts about their family, who continue to influence them so profoundly. What Pinter is therefore concerned with in this play is an archetypal form of familial disconnection, with each aspect of it being represented by a key family player; in particular, this kind of disconnection manifests itself in the withholding of 'midnight' thoughts, which are those private, keenly felt sentiments deemed too intimate to be communicated directly. The subsequent discussion will show that the underlying cause of these out-of-synch antiphonal voices is a fault-line in this specific type of family: the father's seeming indifference to his son (during life) has made all three 'family haunted', since their deepest yearnings still centre upon the original triadic relationship, which, tragically, leads to conflicts that constitute their estrangement.

Returning to Voice 1, the question which suddenly disrupts his small-talk ('Do you miss me?') is an unusual one for a son to ask, as it is more commonly directed towards a lover. That may be so, but the analogy itself is not lost on Pinter, as he will depict this mother-son relationship as intimate and intense, even if their relationship is conducted from afar. Already in the opening preamble, Pinter implies, in a number of ways, that this man, of indeterminate, but presumably youthful, age lives his life as a 'good boy', as his existence is always in implicit dialogue with his mother. Firstly, the young man declares initially that he is 'Dead drunk' after 'five pints in The Fishmongers Arms'.[252] Later, he 'comes clean':

> When I said I was dead drunk I was of course making a joke. I bet you laughed. Mother? Did you get the joke? You know I never touch alcohol.[253]

[252] *Family Voices*, p.131.
[253] *Family Voices*, p.132.

Jokes sometimes are funny because they break a taboo, and, in this family, it is so unthinkable for this young man to get drunk that the claim is inherently amusing. Of course, his pleasures must have been vetted and approved of by his mother to such an extent that even claiming, into the void, that he is drunk makes him anxious about how his mother might respond: 'Mother? Did you get the joke?'

Secondly, as a continuation of this theme of compliance, he discusses his plans in terms that strongly suggest that he is justifying his life according to what his mother (apparently) expects:

> I expect to make friends in the not too distant future. I expect to make girlfriends too. I expect to meet a very nice girl too. Having met her, I shall bring her home to meet my mother.[254]

This is no son on the verge of independence, because these are not his own wishes, but rather lukewarmly expressed expectations. In his mind, this is what a 'good boy' should be doing, now that he has left the family nest.

Finally, a most definitive example of the mother's pernicious influence from afar, is that, in spite of claiming to be attempting to widen the circle of his acquaintances, he does not talk to anyone outside:

> So they look at me, they try to catch my eye, they expect me to speak. But as I do not know them I do not speak. Nor do I ever feel the slightest temptation to do so. You see, mother, I am not lonely, because all that has

[254] *Family Voices*, p.132.

> ever happened to me is with me, keeps me company; my childhood, for example, through which you, my mother, and he, my father, guided me.[255]

He seems to be following advice that his mother, or father, gave him as a child about not talking to strangers. On a deeper level, though, he does not want to talk to strangers, as he is that mother-obsessed sort of individual, who was treated, for too long, as the mother's phallic object. For him, life is not about making an effort, whether it be with strangers or anything else; rather, they should come to him, and provide him with support and solace. Since he has found a mother substitute in the form of the aged landlady, Mrs Withers, he especially prefers the sanctuary of the boarding house:

> I get on very well with my landlady, Mrs Withers. She tells me I am her solace. I have a drink with her at lunchtime and another one at teatime and then take her for a couple in the evening at The Fishmongers arms.[256]

Voice 1 needs the role of a mother figure, and now that he has found one, he enjoys that hermetic relationship, which ironically, in a tragic sense, constitutes a kind of estrangement from his actual mother. Indeed, with a Mrs Withers present, it would seem he only needs memories of his original mother, and the occasional 'talk' with her.

Voice 2, the mother's voice, follows on immediately from her son's. Her tone, at least initially, is one of bewilderment, and of gentle reproach:

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[255] *Family Voices*, pp.132-133.
[256] *Family Voices*, p.133.

> Darling. Where are you? The flowers are wonderful here. The blooms. You so loved them. Why do you never write? I think of you and wonder how you are. Do you ever think of me? Your mother? Ever? At all?[257]

His mother knows that her son used to love her, like the blooms, but underneath the reproachful tone is the insistent question: 'Am I, your mother, now dead to you?'

This question goes unanswered, as it must, but this does not prevent his mother from wondering about the details of his new life, nor does it hinder her tendency to attempt to insinuate herself in his life:

> Have you made friends with anyone? A nice boy? Or a nice girl? There are so many nice boys and nice girls about. But please don't get mixed up with the other sort. They can land you in such terrible trouble. And you'd hate it so. You're so scrupulous, so particular.
>
> I often think I would love to live happily ever after with you and your young wife. And she would be such a lovely wife to you and I would have the occasional dinner with you both. A dinner I would be quite happy to cook myself, should you both be tired after your long day, as I'm sure you will be.[258]

His mother understands that her son is 'so scrupulous, so particular' because he has been brought up to be a 'good boy', but she also appreciates, probably half-consciously, that his cloistered upbringing gave him the will to vet people, yet not the

[257] *Family Voices*, p.133.
[258] *Family Voices*, p.134.

means: it would be so easy for him to be naively taken in, which is a prophecy subsequently confirmed.

Still, as much as she wonders about his new life, it is impossible for her to not return to her innermost wishes. Unable now to play the role of mother with him cast as a young child, she imagines the next best thing: being mother to her son and his lovely wife. This daydream proves not to be comforting, however, as she quickly returns to that blissful time when he was a young child, and would go on excursions with his father:

> I sometimes walk the cliff path and think of you. I think of the times you walked the cliff path, with your father, with cheese sandwiches. Didn't you? You both sat on the clifftop and ate my cheese sandwiches together. Do you remember our little joke? Munch, munch. We had a damn good walk, your father would say. You mean you had a good munch, munch, I would say. And you would both laugh.[259]

This is a poignant memory, especially so as this is a woman talking out of the void, indeed resisting sinking into the void that represents her complete lack of purpose; as she is acutely aware, she is no longer the mother, who provided sustenance and love to her child. She therefore must return, again and again, to these cherished memories that keep her from falling into the abyss of loneliness, which originated from her having assumed too much proprietorship over her son: 'Darling. I miss you. I gave birth to you. Where are you?'[260] As far as this mother is concerned, the umbilical cord still obtains, and yet, at the same time, she fears that a definitive severance from

[259] *Family Voices*, p.134.
[260] *Family Voices*, p.134.

the family has been made: 'I wrote to you three months ago, telling you of your father's death. Did you receive my letter?'[261]

When Voice 1 talks again, he sounds a note of distinct unease, which is in contrast to his original tone of 'I'm having a very nice time'. Apart from finding Mrs Withers, and her (apparent) daughter, Jane, agreeable, he is so unsure about who the other boarders are that he dislikes them. As far as he is concerned, these people are like some strange, yet fleeting apparition that passes by on his wall; the following excerpt illustrates his attitude:

> But I'm not so sure about the other people in this house. One is an old man. The one who is an old man retires early. He is bald. The other is a woman who wears red dresses. The other one is another man. He is big. He is much bigger than the other man. His hair is black. He has black eyebrows and black hair on the back of his hands.[262]

These descriptions of fellow lodgers are very schematic, as they betray the attitude of a young man who is so alienated from others that he can register his perceptions, but does not possess the wherewithal to confirm them:

> At night I hear whispering from the other rooms and do not understand it. I hear steps on the stairs but do not dare to go out and investigate.[263]

This young man is becoming paranoiac, but what could be called his 'non-investigative' attitude is a longstanding one. At this point in the play, the reasons for

[261] *Family Voices*, p.134.
[262] *Family Voices*, p.135.
[263] *Family Voices*, p.135.

this are not, of course, obvious, but in order to foreshadow what is coming, I wish to discuss his attitudes of timidity and doubt in terms of a 'negative father complex'. Guy Corneau defines this complex as follows:

> The father's absence results in the child's lack of internal structure; this is the very essence of a negative father complex. An individual with a negative father complex does not feel himself structured from within. His ideas are confused; he has trouble setting himself goals, making choices deciding what is good for him, and identifying his own needs. For him, everything gets mixed up: love and reason, sexual appetites and the simple need for affection. He sometimes has problems concentrating, he is distracted by all sorts of insignificant details and in severe cases he has difficulty in organizing his perceptions.[264]

Corneau's thesis can be couched in Lacanian terms, which will render his point about a lack of internal structure clearer. According to Lacan, identification with the Name-of-the-Father initiates the individual into the Symbolic realm which, in turn, provides the male child with access to a complex web of meanings that orientate his existence, and provide him with the illusory promise of achieving 'phallic mastery'. This young man lacks this internal structure, however, as witnessed by his language remaining at the concrete imagistic (Imaginary) level, and by what Voice 2 inadvertently concedes when she says his father was proud of him:

[264] Guy Corneau, *Absent Fathers, Lost Sons* (Boston: Shambhala, 1991), p.37.

> As your father grew closer to his death he spoke more and more of you, with tenderness and bewilderment. I consoled him with the idea that you had left home to make him proud of you. I think I succeeded in this. One of his last sentences was: Give him a slap on the back from me. Give him a slap on the back from me.[265]

Voice 2 expresses an ambivalent message: 'yes, your father was proud of you, but it was founded upon the lie that you left home to make him proud. In actual fact, he normally hardly spoke or thought of you, and you left for reasons nothing to do with him'. Given such a father/son relationship, coupled with his overbearing mother sheltering him, it is no surprise that this young man finds the larger world of relationships an algebraic equation he cannot solve. For him, as an 'uncastrated' man (in the Lacanian sense), the world must indeed remain 'unpenetrated'.

These limitations do not, however, prevent Voice 1 from continuing to try and work out what is going on in this house. He claims a 'remarkable' discovery:

> I have made a remarkable discovery. The old man who is bald and who retires early is named Withers. Benjamin Withers. Unless it is simply a coincidence it must mean that he is a relation.[266]

Voice 1 has made a discovery, but his attention is so focused on solving the riddle of the different relationships that he overlooks a most important occurrence: Mrs Withers is beginning to treat him like a son:

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[265] *Family Voices*, pp.135-136.
[266] *Family Voices*, p.136.

> You are my little pet. I've always wanted a little pet but I've never had one and now I've got one. Sometimes she gives me a cuddle as if she were my mother. But I haven't forgotten that I have a mother and that you are my mother.[267]

Voice 1's remark, 'I haven't forgotten that I have a mother and that you are my mother' raises the possibility that he *might* forget; his mother, in an act of almost maternal telepathy, senses this: 'Sometimes I wonder if you remember that you have a mother'.[268] Underlying his reassurance and her concern is the awareness that he needs a mother figure, as he lacks independence and he compulsively seeks for the security and belonging of the original dyadic relationship.

Voice 2 seems more desperate and indeed angrier now:

> Darling. Where are you? Why do you never write? Nobody knows your whereabouts. Nobody knows if you are alive or dead. Nobody can find you. Have you changed your name?[269]

Voice 2 is frightened that, unbeknownst to her, a final severance has been made ('Have you changed your name?'), which is why her questions almost border on the accusatory: 'Why do you never write?' No answers come, of course, and so, in her anger, she expresses her disapproval and her gnawing sense of bitterness through what his father supposedly said on his deathbed:

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[267] *Family Voices*, p.136.
[268] *Family Voices*, p.136.
[269] *Family Voices*, p.138.

> If you are alive you are a monster. On his deathbed your father cursed you. He cursed me too, to tell the truth. He cursed everyone in sight. Except that you were not in sight. I do not blame you entirely for your father's ill humour, but your absence and silence were a great burden on him, a weariness to him. He died in lamentation and oath. Was that your wish?[270]

The son's 'absence', so-called, will be shown later to have more to do with the father's 'absence', but, for the moment, evidently the mother's bitterness is due to feeling like a spurned lover, who may, at some indeterminate time, be still found in the arms of her partner, once again:

> Or perhaps you will arrive here in a handsome new car, one day, in the not too distant future, in a nice new suit, quite out of the blue, and hold me in your arms.[271]

Although this may sound like a clinical interpretation of events, the mother's transition from hate to love proves that the father's supposed predicament was only used as a pretext for expressing her great disapproval at being 'overlooked'. All would be indeed forgiven if her son would return home, as his father was, in her view, only an appendage to what was their unspoken and unrealizable 'love affair'. Moreover, it is because she construes an incestuous intensity between the two that, paradoxically enough, she cannot communicate these thoughts directly to her son, as these are 'midnight' wishes that express a future that she can never have. Nevertheless, her son stands accused, at least in her court of dreams.

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[270] *Family Voices*, p.138.
[271] *Family Voices*, p.138.

Voice 1 next moves on to express an unusual complication in the play: a resident called Riley turned away two apparent strangers from the door on the grounds that they were imposters:

> Two women stood on the doorstep. They said they were my mother and sister, and asked for me. [Riley] denied knowledge of me. No, he had not heard of me. No, there was no one of that name resident. This was a family house, no strangers admitted. No, they get on very well, thank you very much, without intruders. I suggest, he said, that you both go back to where you came from and stop bothering innocent hardworking people with your slanders and your libels…[272]

It is not without significance that this resident is called 'Riley', as this lodger, like his *The Room* counterpart, is another outsider, and another guardian of the family. Where they differ, is this Riley is a homosexual rather than a black man (he remarks later, for example, that he 'likes slender lads' but, due to his religious beliefs, has to 'keep a tight rein on my inclinations.'[273]) and, more importantly, the family he is protecting is a surrogate one, rather than making a plea to return to the original family. Later, it becomes evident why Riley turned away Voice 1's actual mother and sister from the door:

> There are too many women here, that's the trouble. And it's no use talking to Baldy. He's well away. He lives in another area, best known to himself. I like health and strength and intelligent conversation. That's why I took a fancy to

[272] *Family Voices*, p.139.
[273] *Family Voices*, p.144.

> you, chum, apart from the fact that I fancy you. I've got no-one to talk to. These women treat me like a leper. Even though I'm a relation. Of a sort.[274]

Like Voice 1, Riley is another 'lost son', as both are isolated from their fathers, and neither of them can receive much emotional support from the old man Mr Withers, otherwise known as 'Baldy'. Riley's solution to this problem of the 'absent father' is to create a homo (social/sexual) space, because, as convoluted as it may sound, his misogynistic contempt for all women is an attempt to achieve, without any paternal advice and support, a degree of independence. Of course, this disavowal of mother and of all women means that Riley, in Pinter's view, becomes a homosexual, who lusts after young, slender men.

The other 'lost son' has his own conflicts to contend with, which are not so much concerned with renouncing women. Unlike Riley, it would seem, at least at one point, that Voice 1's happiest moment is being accepted by the three ladies of the house:

> Lady Withers wore a necklace around her alabaster neck, a neck amazingly young. She played Schumann. She smiled at me. Mrs Withers and Jane smiled at me. I took a seat. I took it and sat in it. Am in it. I will never leave it. Oh mother, I have found my home, my family. Little did I ever dream I could know such happiness.[275]

A mother-fixated son would naturally feel most at peace with the world when his new circumstances replicate, in their essential features, those of old. Consequently, his

[274] *Family Voices*, p.144.
[275] *Family Voices*, p.141.

happiest moment is when he renounces, in the interests of apparently growing-up, his old family in favour of his new one. It is unsurprising, then, that his mother, at this very point, feels the greatest disconnection from him, which is expressed in her memory of drying his hair as a child:

> [I] then looked into your eyes, and saw you look into mine, knowing that you wanted no one else, no one at all, knowing that you were entirely happy in my arms. I knew also, for example, that I was at the same time sitting by an indifferent fire, alone in winter, in eternal night without you. [276]

His mother describes a bleak sentiment, one which the play nevertheless supports: her greatest moment of connection is like a flicker protesting in vain against the enveloping eternal night. This incestuous love can never be consummated, and besides, the son will, and must, find a substitute.

Unknown to his mother, though, events are beginning to conspire towards her son returning home. It all begins when Voice 1 is invited into Baldy's (otherwise known as Mr Withers) room, where he offers to the young man almost incomprehensible advice. Here is an example:

> My name's Withers. I'm there or thereabouts. Follow? Embargo on all duff terminology. With me? Embargo on all things redundant. All areas in that connection verboten. You're in a diseaseridden land, boxer. Keep your weight on all the left feet you can lay your hands on. Keep dancing. The old foxtrot is the classical response but that's not the response I'm talking about. Nor am I

[276] *Family Voices*, p.141.

> talking about the other response. Up the slaves. Get me? This is a place of creatures, up and down stairs. Creatures of the rhythmic splits, the rhythmic sideswipes, the rums and roulettes, the macaroni tatters, the dumplings in jam mayonnaise, a catapulting ordure of gross and ramshackle shenanigans, openended paraphernalia. Follow me? It all adds up.[277]

In the midst of this deluge of delusions, there are some things that make sort of sense: Withers alludes to the house being a brothel ('Creatures of the rhythmic splits' and of 'gross and ramshackle shenanigans') and he offers some cryptic, but nevertheless sexual advice that centres upon not doing the 'classical' foxtrot response, yet avoiding the 'perils' of homosexuality ('Up the slaves'). Still, while he may claim that 'It all adds up', frankly it does not, which is Pinter's point: Withers represents the kind of father figure who lays down laws (e.g., 'All areas in that connection verboten') in the Name-of-the-Father, but, just like how hard it was to initially determine his name, it is challenging to derive sense from what is verging on nonsense. In essence, what Withers represents is a father figure who cannot lay down the 'law' of what it means, symbolically, to be a man.

No one feels this lack as acutely as Voice 1, as his emotionally absent father bequeathed an unenviable ontological legacy: without any clear idea of what it is to *be* a man, Voice 1 has no sense of what he, as an independent agent, must *become*. Even he recognises that there are several portentous signs about his likely future, one of which is that he is becoming less and less independent, whilst, at the same time, the house is becoming more and more his prison:

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[277] *Family Voices*, pp.142-143.

> But I rarely leave the house. No one seems to leave the house. Riley leaves the house but rarely. He must be a secret policeman. Jane continues to do a great deal of homework while apparently not attending any school. Lady Withers never leaves the house. She has guests. She receives guests. Those are the steps I hear on the stairs at night.[278]

Voice 1 does not realize that one of the reasons (perhaps the main one) that the women do not venture outside is that this house is a brothel, and they are 'ladies of the night'. But, in his case, the motive for his withdrawing from the world is more obscure; it is only in a later passage that a sufficient reason is given:

> They have decided a name for me. They call me Bobo. Good morning, Bobo, or, Don't drop a goolie, Bobo, or, Don't forget the diver, Bobo, or, Keep your eye on the ball, Bobo, or, Keep this side of the tramlines, Bobo, or, How's the lead in your pencil, Bobo, or, How's tricks in the sticks, Bobo, or, Don't get too much gum in your gumboots, Bobo.
>
> The only person who does not call me Bobo is the old man. He calls me nothing. I call him nothing. I don't see him. He keeps to his room. I don't go near it. He is old and will die soon.[279]

The women in the house have begun to deliberately treat him as though he were a child, with them, in the complementary role, of mother-figure; furthermore, Riley, with his erotic-like possessiveness, is also a sort of mother-figure too. Voice 1 is

[278] *Family Voices*, p.145.
[279] *Family Voices*, pp.146-147.

indeed being ‘infantilized’, hence why he is regressing to a state of almost unmitigated dependence on those in the boarding house.

In order to save his ‘soul’, as it were, Voice 1 recognises that he must urgently return to his original home and talk to his father, as Withers does not hinder his development by treating him as a child; nevertheless, he does not promote any nascent potential for independence:

> I’m coming back to you, mother, to hold you in my arms. I am coming home. I am coming also to clasp my father’s shoulder. Where is the old boy? I’m longing to have a word with him. Where is he? I’ve looked in all the usual places, including the old summerhouse, but I can’t find him. Don’t tell me he’s left home at his age? That would be inexpressibly skittish a gesture on his part. What have you done with him, mother?[280]

Voice 1 is unaware of the fact that his father is dead, and so the advice and the support that he may have received goes unspoken. To underscore this, Pinter introduces, at this late stage in the play, Voice 3–the voice of his father. Here is a relevant passage:

> Well, that is not entirely true [that I’m not dead], not entirely the case. I’m lying. I’m leading you up the garden path, I’m playing about, I’m having my bit of fun, that’s what. Because I am dead. As dead as a doornail. I’m writing to you from my grave. A quick word for old time’s sake. Just to keep in touch. An old hullo out of the dark. A last kiss from Dad.

[280] *Family Voices*, pp.147-148.

> I'll probably call it a day after this canter. Not much more to say. All a bit of a sweat. Why am I taking the trouble? Because of you, I suppose, because you were such a loving son. I'm smiling, as I lie in this glassy grave.[281]

These are poignant words, uttered by a (supposedly) dead man, and yet they very much live. Indeed, they are poignant, because they are a last goodbye, and they affirm a truth that was never uttered during his lifetime: Voice 1 was 'such a loving son'. Sadly, as Pinter intimates, the emotionally absent father did not 'take the trouble', though, during life, and now his words go forever unheard.

At the play's conclusion, Voice 1 is returning home, expecting to receive love, and a wise word from his father:

> I am on my way back to you. I am about to make the journey back to you. What will you say to me?[282]

The answers, from his mother and father respectively, are not encouraging:

> I'll tell you what, my darling, I've given you up as a very bad job. Tell me one last thing. Do you think the word love means anything?
>
> I have so much to say to you. But I am quite dead. What I have to say to you will never be said.[283]

[281] *Family Voices*, p.146.
[282] *Family Voices*, p.148.
[283] *Family Voices*, p.148.

In their own respective and distinctive ways, these voices sing a song of estrangement: his mother, with her incestuous possessiveness, curses his independence; his father, with his retiring attitude towards life, retreated from his paternal responsibilities, such that all the kind and wise words will now go unspoken. Tragically, this, in effect, constitutes the son's legacy, which is to be forever a 'fatherless boy'.

III

The Homecoming opens with a seemingly innocuous question that is, in reality, an accusation:

> MAX: What have you done with the scissors?
>
> *Pause.*
>
> I said I'm looking for the scissors. What have you done with them?
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Did you hear me? I want to cut something out of the paper.
>
> LENNY: I'm reading the paper.
>
> MAX: Not that paper. I haven't even read that paper. I'm talking about last Sunday's paper. I was just having a look at it in the kitchen.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Do you hear what I'm saying? I'm talking to you! Where's the scissors?
>
> LENNY (*looking up, quietly*): Why don't you shut up, you daft prat?
>
> MAX *lifts his stick and points it at him.*
>
> MAX: Don't you talk to me like that. I'm warning you.[284]

[284] Pinter, *The Homecoming: Plays 3* (London: Faber, 1991), p.15.

In this opening exchange, Pinter already shows that this family exist within a hotbed atmosphere of pervasive distrust and profound contempt for one another, as 'missing' scissors become immediate grounds for blame, which then leads to insults and direct threats. Aggression in this family is barely hidden away, and the corrosive effects of familiarity have led to an almost complete absence of civility.

As Max continues to talk, and Lenny listens, it becomes clearer that the son has developed a strategy that precludes extensive quarrelling, as Lenny alternates between seeing his father as either a 'non-person', or some figure only suitable for mockery. The following passage illustrates Max's humiliating predicament, as Lenny discounts his father so much that the only recognition he gives of his presence is to insult him:

> MAX: I think I'll have a fag. Give me a fag.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> I just asked you to give me a cigarette.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Look what I'm lumbered with.
>
> *He takes a crumpled cigarette from his pocket.*
>
> I'm getting old, my word of honour.
>
> *He lights it.*
>
> You think I wasn't a tearaway? I could have taken care of you, twice over. I'm still strong. You ask your Uncle Sam what I was. But at the same time I always had a kind heart. Always.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> I used to knock about with a man called MacGregor. I called him Mac.

You remember Mac? Eh?

Pause.

We were two of the worst hated men in the West end of London. I tell you I still got the scars. We'd walk into a place, the whole room'd stand up, they'd make their way to let us pass. You never heard such silence. Mind you, he was a big man, he was over six foot tall. His family were all MacGregors, they came all the way from Aberdeen, but he was the only one they called Mac.

Pause.

He was very fond of your mother, Mac was. Very fond. He always had a good word for her.

Pause.

Mind you, she wasn't such a bad woman. Even though it made me sick just to look at her rotten stinking face, she wasn't such a bad bitch. I gave her the best bleeding years of my life, anyway.

LENNY: Plug it, will you, you stupid sod. I'm trying to read the paper.

MAX: Listen! I'll chop your spine off, you talk to me like that! You understand? Talking to your lousy filthy father like that!

LENNY: You know what, you're getting demented.[285]

Not being able to even get a cigarette from your own son would ordinarily be upsetting, but Max, in spite of his proclamations that he 'had a kind heart', has long ago given up on expressing the 'softer' feelings of life. On the contrary, he assumes,

[285] *The Homecoming*, pp.13-14.

like many men do, the patriarchal view that what one needs to possess is not so much kindness, but unyielding authority; this is why, for example, his request for a cigarette is an imperative ('Give me a cigarette'), and his rebuttal to Lenny is based upon an exercise of supposed physical power: 'I'll chop your spine off, you talk to me like that!' Yet, as Max knows only too well, his word is certainly not law in this household, and so he compensates by mythologizing his past experiences with his best friend, MacGregor, as this was supposedly a time when he was a commanding, hated, yet fascinating figure.

In light of these early events, Max's claim to be one of the 'worst hated men in the West End of London' is a somewhat ironic admission, as it would appear that he is now the most hated in his family home. For an audience member watching this play, a natural question to ask at this point would be this: why has this aggressive, confrontational man never inspired any respect, indeed any fear from his son? For example, shortly after threatening to 'chop off' Lenny's spine, Max's phallic power is ridiculed by his son:

> LENNY: Oh, Daddy, you're not going to use your stick on me, are you? Eh? Don't use your stick on me Daddy. No, please. It wasn't my fault, it was one of the others. I haven't done anything wrong, Dad, honest. Don't clout me with that stick, Dad.[286]

As the play progresses, the audience learns why Max possesses, as it were, so little 'clout', as his family have never 'succumbed' entirely to the dominant patriarchal ideology, since their late mother, Jessie, refused to be 'domesticated'. In a most

[286] *The Homecoming*, p.19.

oblique fashion, Pinter introduces the role that Jessie played when he has Max relate how he had a 'gift' for telling which horses would last the course:

> Because I always had the smell of a good horse. I could smell him. And not only the colts, but the fillies. Because the fillies are more highly strung than the colts, they're more unreliable, did you know that? No, what do you know? Nothing. But I was always able to tell a good filly by one particular trick. I'd look her in the eye. You see? I'd stand in front of her and look her straight in the eye, it was a kind of hypnotism, and by the look deep down in her eye I could tell whether she was a stayer or not. It was a gift. I had a gift.[287]

Uncle Sam's later admission that 'MacGregor had Jessie in the back of my cab as I drove along'[288] will brutally undermine Max's credibility about possessing a 'gift' for detecting 'unreliability', but at this point he unwittingly provides an excellent metaphor for how patriarchy situates women in the family. More fully, as Max unintentionally concedes, what husbands do is 'domesticate' women by 'training' them to 'stay the course', which means they become obedient, monogamous wives. Of course, this 'training' only works if men can be construed as figures of authority and of fascination, as they must, like hypnotists, persuade their wives to submit to their word as though it were unquestionable law.

In this particular case, however, Max possessed no authority over his wife, Jessie; indeed he was quite unable at the beginning to discern that she was not a 'stayer', nor was he later capable of making her submit to the wider ideological 'rules'. Due to his perceived failure as a man, Max is prone to alternate between

[287] *The Homecoming*, p.18.
[288] *The Homecoming*, p.86.

licking his wounds, so to speak, and reminding anyone within earshot, lest they forget, that he has all the 'credentials' of a father. With his brother Sam, in particular, he not only takes the opportunity to brag, but he also shows his cruel, mocking streak, as Sam's life as a bachelor provides Max with an opportunity to attack a target that is even more a figure of fun than the betrayed, emasculated husband i.e., the effeminate, mummy's boy, who has never, on an emotional level, left the nest. Here is a good example, where Max explains why he looks after his brothers:

> Before he died, Sam. Just before. They were his last words. His last sacred words, Sammy. You think I'm joking? You think when my father spoke–on his deathbed–I wouldn't obey his words to the last letter? You hear that, Joey? He'll stop at nothing. He's even prepared to spit on the memory of our Dad. What kind of a son were you, you wet wick? You spent half your time doing crossword puzzles! We took you into the shop, you couldn't even sweep the dust off the floor. We took MacGregor into the shop, he could run the place by the end of a week. Well, I'll tell you one thing. I respected my father not only as a man but as a number one butcher! And to prove it I followed him into the shop. I learned to carve a carcass at his knee. I commemorated his name in blood. I gave birth to three grown men! All on my own bat. What have you done?[289]

Since Max evidently lacks phallic power, he is keen to poke fun at Sam's apparent impotence ('you wet wick?') and lack of physical strength ('you couldn't even sweep the dust off the floor').Nevertheless, what he is most eager to assert, almost to the

[289] *The Homecoming*, pp.47-48.

point of portraying himself in a hyper-masculine way, is that he was a model son, who obeyed his father's word as law 'to the last letter', and that he was a model father, gifted with the unprecedented ability to 'give birth to three grown men'. Of course, whilst he may, in fact, have been a dutiful son, who continued the family business, his conspicuous refusal to credit Jessie in the co-creation of his three sons is not only to score against Sam's celibacy, but to leave out the woman responsible for his conflictual relationship with his sons. The reality, as Max knows full well, is that Jessie exerted an inordinate degree of influence over her three sons, which is a truth that he can somewhat acknowledge when he wishes to wax lyrical about the virtues of his family:

> That woman was the backbone to this family. I mean, I was busy working twenty-four hours a day in the shop, I was going all over the country to find meat, I was making my way in the world, but I left a woman at home with a will of iron, a heart of gold and a mind.[290]

With Max being absent so much, this gaping hole 'crippled' his family, as he freely admits when he provides a scathing, if too self-exculpatory, assessment of his predicament:

> A crippled family, three bastard sons, a slutbitch of a wife–don't talk to me about the pains of childbirth–I suffered the pain, I've still got the pangs–when

[290] *The Homecoming*, p.54.

> I give a little cough, my back collapses–and here I've got a lazy idle bugger of a brother won't even get to work on time.[291]

This contemptuous attack on his family shows that Max worships industriousness, and yet he has failed to see that this very industriousness took its toll, since his absences from home provided an opportunity for Jessie's infidelities, whilst also ensuring that his three pampered sons had almost complete proprietorship over her. Furthermore, and just as disastrous in its consequences, Max unwittingly confesses in his comments about his 'three bastard sons' and in his defensive claim that he gave 'birth' to them that what is most questionable is his paternity. Lenny, for one, has his suspicions, which he raises in his typical cockney 'taking the piss' style:

> I'll tell you what, Dad, since you're in the mood for a bit of a…chat, I'll ask you a question. It's a question I've been meaning to ask you for some time. That night…you know…the night you got me…that night with mum, what was it like? Eh? When I was just a glint in your eye. What was it like? What was the background to it? I mean, I want to know the real facts about my background.[292]

Although Jessie is absent in this play, Pinter suggests that, in the past, she never felt much incentive to submit to Max's authority, as he was away from home a great deal, which meant that her affections were either directed maternally towards her children, or adulterously towards unnamed men. Consequently, from a Lacanian perspective, Jessie's three sons were subjected to an unusual and problematic form of Oedipal

[291] *The Homecoming*, p.55.
[292] *The Homecoming*, p.44.

'triangulation', as Jessie did not submit to Max in the 'Name of the father', partly because his absences undermined his authority, and partly because he was not even the biological father. Rather, the symbolic placeholder of Father is construed as an occasional usurper, who, whether he is Max or a fling like MacGregor, temporarily disrupts the blissful dyadic bond between mother and son. Thus, the Father role is construed both as an irritant and as a figure to disrespect, which is why none of the sons take heed of what Max says; instead, in as far as they do accord him a significant role in the family, it is as a substitute mother figure, who does the domestic duties for them. Max himself bemoans this fact at one point:

> JOEY: Feel a bit hungry.
>
> SAM: Me, too.
>
> MAX: Who do you think I am, your mother? Eh? Honest. They walk in here every time of the day and night like bloody animals. Go and find yourself a mother.[293]

Due to their unconventional upbringing, Max's three sons need a mother, but they have never needed to submit to Father. This is why, in Lenny and Joey's case, they wait for the 'return' of mother rather than adopt, as most men do, their ideological position as husbands and fathers. Indeed, as we shall see in more detail later, the Symbolic realm has little claim on Jessie's three sons.

Max's suggestion that they 'Go find yourself a mother' surprisingly comes true when Teddy, the eldest son, arrives at night with his wife, Ruth. Unbeknownst to the sleeping family, their deepest wish has been fulfilled, although at this early stage

[293] *The Homecoming*, p.24.

in the play, Ruth seems more like a subdued wife than a mother. Initially, the explanation for Ruth's quietness and slightly melancholic demeanour appears to be her understandable awkwardness about her husband staging his 'homecoming' to happen by night:

> TEDDY and RUTH *stand at the threshold of the room. They are both well dressed in light summer suits and light raincoats. Two suitcases are by their side. They look at the room.* TEDDY *tosses the key in his hand, smiles.*
>
> TEDDY: Well the key worked.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> They haven't changed the lock.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> RUTH: No one's here.
>
> TEDDY (*looking up)*: They're asleep.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> RUTH: Can I sit down?
>
> TEDDY: Of course.
>
> RUTH: I'm tired.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> TEDDY: Then sit down.
>
> *She does not move.*
>
> That's my father's chair.
>
> RUTH: That one?
>
> TEDDY (*smiling)*: Yes, that's it. Shall I go up and see if my room's still there?

RUTH: It can't have moved.

TEDDY: No, I mean if my bed's still there.

RUTH: Someone might be in it.

TEDDY: No, they've got their own beds.

Pause.

RUTH: Shouldn't you wake somebody up? Tell them you're here?

TEDDY: Not at this time of night. It's too late.[294]

Ostensibly, Teddy is oblivious to the oddity of arriving so late, and indeed, he seems almost glad that he can survey the house without the interference of his family; later it becomes obvious, though, that this arrival is strategic, as he is emotionally distanced, to say the least, from his family, and considers them, in spite of his protestations, to be 'ogres':

TEDDY: There's no need to be nervous. Are you nervous?

RUTH: No.

TEDDY: There's no need to be.

Pause.

They're very warm people, really. Very warm. They're my family. They're not ogres.[295]

Curiously, Ruth may be a little awkward rather than nervous about their peculiar kind of arrival, but what grates the most against her sensibilities is that the way this 'homecoming' has been staged is symptomatic of her husband's selfish and

[294] *The Homecoming*, p28.
[295] *The Homecoming*, p.31.

narcissistic way of treating others. Consequently, although she wishes to leave, she has learnt from experience that there is little point in her making an emotional plea, as Teddy pays no attention to her deeper needs, such as to be with her family:

` RUTH: Do you want to stay?

TEDDY: Stay?

Pause.

We've come to stay. We're bound to stay…for a few days.

RUTH: I think…the children…might be missing us.

TEDDY: Don't be silly.

RUTH: They might.

TEDDY: Look, we'll be back in a few days, won't we?

He walks about the room.

Nothing's changed. Still the same.

Pause.

Still, he'll get a surprise in the morning, won't he? The old man. I think you'll like him very much. Honestly. He's a…well, he's old, of course. Getting on.

Pause.

I was born here, do you realize that?[296]

In light of Ruth's later refusal to return with Teddy to the children, her tentative suggestion that they not stay is decidedly ironic. But, for present purposes, the wider point is that Ruth knows that it is pointless to assert what she wants, as Teddy will not

[296] *The Homecoming*, pp.29-30.

listen; he finds it easy to speak for both of them in an authoritative manner ('We've come to stay'), and he makes petulant retorts when Ruth raises any objections to what he wishes to do: 'I was born here, do you realize that?' Obviously, as far as Teddy is concerned, they are a matching pair in a way that goes beyond them wearing corresponding light summer suits.

With a husband so self-absorbed, Ruth has become, over the years, a possession, in fact, a necessary appendage. Pinter intimates that Ruth's presence is required to keep Teddy existentially secure, as is evidenced by his distress and confusion over his wife deciding to go for a late-night stroll:

> TEDDY: At this time of night? But we've…only just got here. We've got to go to bed.
>
> RUTH: I just feel like some air.
>
> TEDDY: But I'm going to bed.
>
> RUTH: That's all right.
>
> TEDDY: But what am I going to do?
>
> *Pause*.
>
> The last thing that I want is a breath of fresh air. Why do you want a breath of fresh air?
>
> RUTH: I just do.[297]

Teddy did not mind letting Ruth go to bed while he stayed up, but when Ruth asserts, perhaps for the first time, that she wishes to leave his 'suffocating' presence and do something independently, he finds this very confusing and unnerving. According to

[297] *The Homecoming*, p.32.

his solipsistic reasoning, since he does not wish to do something, he cannot figure out why Ruth would wish to behave differently, which says a great deal about how little he accords his wife a separate and autonomous existence. Such behaviour no doubt seems puzzling, but a later disclosure from his Uncle Sam offers a plausible explanation as to why Teddy treats Ruth in this domineering, yet quietly confident manner:

> SAM: Teddy, shall I tell you something? You were always your mother's favourite. She told me. It's true. You were always the…you were always the main object of her love.[298]

While Teddy's 'being-in the-world' will be discussed at more length later, Sam's secretive disclosure suggests that Teddy was pampered and treated as her main love object. If this confession is true, then it explains why Teddy would be so 'contained', and yet so conjoined with his wife, as his status as phallic object meant that he virtually never had to submit to any other authority, since his mother was, in many respects, his alone. Now that his connection to Jessie is definitively severed, Teddy thus expresses considerable distress at the prospect of his mother substitute, Ruth, leaving even for a stroll, as he exists at the emotional level of an infant, who must know, at every stage, where she is situated. In short, his lack of genuine independence, combined with his deep-seated conviction in his own centrality, makes him, in the colloquial sense, a 'control freak'.

After an oblique and somewhat forced exchange with Lenny, Teddy decides to go to bed, leaving Ruth to encounter his brother upon her return. Right from the

[298] *The Homecoming*, p.71.

beginning of their conversation, there is some verbal sparring, only this time, Lenny is not so clearly the victor:

> LENNY: Good evening.
>
> RUTH: Morning, I think.
>
> LENNY: You're right there.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> My name's Lenny. What's yours?
>
> RUTH: Ruth.
>
> *She sits, puts her coat collar around her.*
>
> LENNY: Cold?
>
> RUTH: No.
>
> LENNY: It's been a wonderful summer, hasn't it? Remarkable.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Would you like something? Refreshment of some kind? An aperitif, anything like that?
>
> RUTH: No thanks.
>
> LENNY: I'm glad you said that. We haven't got a drink in the house. Mind you, I'd soon get some in, if we had a party or something like that. Some kind of celebration…you know.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> You must be connected with my brother in some way. The one who's been abroad.
>
> RUTH: I'm his wife.[299]

[299] *The Homecoming*, pp.35-36.

Lenny, in his opening gambit, wishes to come across as the debonair gentleman, the host, who makes conversation about the weather and then asks whether she wants an aperitif; of course, this is not done out of any real sense of courtesy, but rather as a means to underscore the absurdity of their late-night, unannounced arrival. Ruth, in turn, instinctively realizes, right from the start, that Lenny is a mocker, and she decides neither to concede anything to him, including inaccurate pleasantries ('Morning, I think'), nor to admit to any vulnerability, such as being cold. At this stage, Ruth's direct, yet nonchalant attitude does not seem to faze Lenny, however, as he gives her a glass of water before asking her about her connections to Teddy and what they had been up to in the recent past:

> RUTH: We're on a visit to Europe.
>
> LENNY: What, both of you?
>
> RUTH: Yes.
>
> LENNY: What, you sort of live over there with him, do you?
>
> RUTH: We're married.
>
> LENNY: On a visit to Europe, eh? Seen much of it?
>
> RUTH: We've just come from Italy.
>
> LENNY: Oh, you went to Italy first, did you? And then he brought you over to meet the family, did he? Well, the old man'll be pleased to see you, I can tell you.
>
> RUTH: Good.
>
> LENNY: What did you say?

RUTH: Good.[300]

It is decidedly odd that Lenny seems surprised that Teddy's wife should be accompanying him on holiday, and furthermore, it is bizarre that he describes their relationship as 'you sort of live over there with him, do you?' Both of his reactions can be explained, though, by taking into account that Lenny's mother, Jessie, did 'sort of live with' Max, and that, as a couple, they hardly did spend any time around one another. Thus, marriage for Lenny is hardly a sacred institution, and, as their conversation progresses, it becomes clear that he does not accord women, ostensibly at least, any degree of respect. Indeed, in a most surprising move, he asks to hold Ruth's hand, and when she wonders why, he explains using an anecdote about a recent occurrence at the docks, where a lady made a 'proposal':

> This lady had been searching for me for days. She lost tracks of my whereabouts. However, the fact was she eventually caught up with me, and when she caught up with me she made this certain proposal. Well, this proposal wasn't entirely out of order and normally I would have subscribed to it in the normal course of events. The only trouble was she was falling apart with the pox. So I turned it down. Well, this lady was very insistent and started taking liberties with me down under this arch, liberties which by any criterion I couldn't be expected to tolerate, the fact being what they were, so I clumped her one. It was on my mind to do away with her, you

[300] *The Homecoming*, p.37.

> know, kill her, and the fact is, as killings go, it would have been a simple matter, nothing to it.[301]

In spite of Lenny concluding this tale somewhat anticlimactically (he 'only' gave the woman 'another belt in the nose and a couple turns of the boot'), he is, on a conscious level, sending out a strong message to Ruth that he is a man with a violent temper, and his preferences are not to be taken lightly. Nevertheless, if this anecdote is understood in the context of wanting to hold her hand, it is more a description of his acute anxiety than a cautionary tale. Although Lenny's wish to hold Ruth's hand shows that he aches for some degree of physical intimacy with a woman (something which is conspicuously absent in his homosocial household) his violent reaction to the lady taking 'liberties' suggests that he is deeply frightened of women that assume an assertive relationship to men, which is why he initiated a counterattack. In fact, it turns out that he calls them, somewhat arbitrarily, 'diseased':

> RUTH: How did you know she was diseased?
>
> LENNY: How did I know?
>
> *Pause*.
>
> I decided she was.
>
> *Silence*.[302]

Later, Lenny's relationship to the symbolic realm will be discussed in more detail, but for the moment, what is relevant is that assigning this flirtatious woman to the category of 'diseased' reflects his deep-seated ambivalence towards promiscuity. To

[301] *The Homecoming*, pp.38-39.
[302] *The Homecoming*, p.39.

be clear, this is not because he has some moral objection to adultery or prostitution (his work as a pimp attests to that), but rather it has to do with his need for control, as his mother has left him with this legacy of ambivalence: on the one hand, the promiscuous and the assertive remind him of Jessie such that submitting to their affections is not entirely unwelcome; on the other hand, these women are, by their very definition, inconstant in love, and there is always the threat of being abandoned. For Lenny, then, his pseudo-resolution to this ambivalence is, as his role as pimp implies, to try and dominate the promiscuous, so that he can keep them on a 'leash' and hence 'around'. Ruth, however, quickly exposes Lenny's sham, as she demonstrates that his depiction of himself as a physically violent and domineering man is all talk, which is evident when he tries to take her glass away from her:

> LENNY: And now perhaps I'll relieve you of your glass.
>
> RUTH: I haven't quite finished.
>
> LENNY: You've consumed quite enough in my opinion.
>
> RUTH: No I haven't.
>
> LENNY: Quite sufficient, in my own opinion.
>
> RUTH: Not in mine, Leonard.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> LENNY: Don't call me that, please.
>
> RUTH: Why not?
>
> LENNY: That's the name my mother gave me.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Just give me the glass.
>
> RUTH: No.

Pause.

LENNY: I'll take it then.

RUTH: If you take the glass…I'll take you.

Pause.

LENNY: How about me taking the glass without you taking me?

RUTH: Why don't I just take you?

Pause.

LENNY: You're joking.

Pause.

You're in love, anyway, with another man. You've had a secret liaison with another man. His family didn't even know. Then you come here without a word of warning and start to make trouble.

She lifts up the glass and lifts it towards him.

RUTH: Have a sip. Go on. Have a sip from my glass.

He is still.

Sit on my lap. Take a long cool sip.

She pats her lap. Pause. She stands, moves to him with the glass.

Put your head back and open your mouth.

LENNY: Take that glass away from me.

RUTH: Lie on the floor. Go on. I'll pour it down your throat.

LENNY: What are you doing, making me some kind of proposal?

She laughs shortly, drains the glass.

RUTH: Oh, I was thirsty.[303]

[303] *The Homecoming*, pp.41-43.

Even though Lenny made out that he was ready to kill the woman down at the dock for taking 'liberties', he is so impotent when Ruth confronts him that he can neither take the glass of water away, nor can he 'take' her. Ruth, in contrast, has no problem about being assertive, and what is most significant about her approach is that she immediately recognises the strategic advantage of Lenny unwittingly conceding that he had a particularly close relationship with his mother (after all, it is only she that can call him Leonard), as she starts to pretend that she is Jessie, who is imploring him, in a most seductive way, to take a sip from her glass and sit on her lap. Despite Lenny's protestations, though, it is obvious that he is transfixed by her proposals, as his unresolved Oedipal fixation on his mother, coupled with his corresponding passivity that comes from being the object of Jessie's desire, means that he wants to submit to this mother/whore figure. As for Ruth, she concludes this battle of wits feeling enervated, as it is not only her thirst that has been quenched; indeed, unlike in her relationship with the abstracted, almost asexual Teddy, she has had a rare opportunity to express her sexuality, and she realizes that there was, very much so, a 'thirst' needing to be 'quenched'.

Lenny's dismissive and misogynistic presumption that Ruth is 'trouble' turns out to be widely shared, as Max's reaction to seeing her for the first time is to call her a tart, and a 'stinking pox-ridden slut':

MAX: Who asked you to bring tarts in here?

TEDDY: Tarts?

MAX: Who asked you to bring dirty tarts into this house?

TEDDY: Listen, don't be silly–

MAX: Have you been here all night?

> TEDDY: Yes, we arrived from Venice.
>
> MAX: We've had a smelly scrubber in my house all night. We've had a stinking pox-ridden slut in my house all night.
>
> TEDDY: Stop it! What are you talking about?
>
> MAX: I haven't seen the bitch for six years, he comes home without a word, he brings a filthy scrubber off the street, he shacks up in my house!
>
> TEDDY: She's my wife! We're married!
>
> *Pause.*
>
> MAX: I've never had a whore under this roof before. Ever since your mother died. My word of honour. (*To Joey*) Have you ever had a whore here? Has Lenny ever had a whore here? They come back from America, they bring the slopbucket with them. They bring the bedpan with them. (*To Teddy*) Take that disease away from me. Get her away from me.
>
> TEDDY: She's my wife.[304]

Max's annoyance at their sudden arrival is somewhat understandable, but his rage at Ruth's presence is unwarranted, suggesting that she is more an outlet for long suppressed feelings of hatred towards Jessie, who was, in his view, the last 'whore' under his roof. Significantly, Max construes her in disease-ridden terms, as though she were an infection that is to spread into his sanitised household, which is a belief about (promiscuous) women that Lenny shares too, as evidenced by his admission that he called that particular lady of the night 'diseased' because he had wanted to depict her in that way. With such a scathing view of women, it is unsurprising that Max orders Joey to throw them both out as a form of 'quarantine', but, in light of later

[304] *The Homecoming*, pp.49-50.

developments, what is important is that Joey feels no need to comply; on the contrary, he abstains from obeying his father's wish, leading to Max attacking his son, and a brief, if quite painful skirmish, between Max, Joey and Sam. More fully, after Max has punched Joey and fallen to the ground (almost like a bee stinging before dying), and Sam has been attacked in the process, Max gets back onto his feet again and adopts a decidedly different attitude towards Ruth:

> MAX: Miss.
>
> *Ruth walks towards him.*
>
> RUTH: Yes?
>
> *He looks at her.*
>
> MAX: You a mother?
>
> RUTH: Yes.
>
> MAX: How many you got?
>
> RUTH: Three.
>
> *He turns to Teddy.*
>
> MAX: All yours Ted?
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Teddy, why don't we have a nice cuddle and kiss, eh? Like the old days? What about a nice cuddle and kiss, eh?
>
> TEDDY: Come on, then.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> MAX: You want to kiss your old father? Want a cuddle with your old father?[305]

[305] *The Homecoming*, pp.51.

Max's sudden change of heart can only be explained by him expending his aggression, and his revisionary construal of Ruth and of Teddy. With respect to Ruth, Max starts to see her as a mother, which is a role that he idealizes, mainly because it is a supporter of the family structure, and it therefore consolidates his role as head of household and authority figure; as for his attitude towards Teddy, he becomes affectionate once he learns that his son has followed in his footsteps (the only one to do so) by having three children, and he acts almost maternally when he asks whether Teddy wants a cuddle and a kiss. Nevertheless, in spite of the mood changing, there is a disturbing undercurrent to Max's shift in attitudes, as he seemed only interested in Ruth in as far as she was a means to the end of creating children. Thus, Max has no moral objections to a utilitarian attitude towards women, but rather he supports, as a member of patriarchy, women being exploited for the purposes of creating children. A member of the audience would therefore not be wrong in wondering whether Ruth has already been a kind of prostitute back in the States, as her married life might very well have been all about delivering the 'goods' only to then be materially rewarded with the benefits of a professor's salary.

Once Ruth starts to 'mingle' with the family, so to speak, she asserts her specifically female presence in a way that constitutes a more coy, less predatory manner than that which she adopted in her late-night encounter with Lenny. At one point, she objects to Lenny and Teddy's hyper-abstract, pseudo-philosophical discussion, where the former talks about the difficulties of symbolisation, using the example of a table: 'All right, I say, *take* it, *take* a table, but once you've taken it,

what are you going to do with it? Once you've got hold of it, where you going to take it?'[306] This is Ruth's riposte:

> Don't be too sure though. You've forgotten something. Look at me. I…move my leg. That's all it is. But I wear…underwear…which moves with me…it…captures your attention. Perhaps you misinterpret. The action is simple. It's a leg…moving. My lips move. Why don't you restrict…your observations to that? Perhaps the fact that they move is more significant…than the words which come through them. You must bear that…possibility in mind.
>
> *Silence.*
>
> Teddy *stands.*[307]

Ruth's rejoinder to Lenny's question about 'taking' the table addresses the sexual symbolism of his query, as Lenny's doubts are symptomatic of his underlying impotence: he is most unsure about 'taking' a woman, as he lacks, for reasons to be described later, the usual patriarchal conviction that he is the dominant and aggressive partner in the relationship; in other words, he is not situated very comfortably in the patriarchal ideology, which advocates that the man is the 'seizer'. Nevertheless, Ruth's objection has more to do with Teddy than with Lenny, as what Ruth is saying in essence is that men's relationship towards women should not be a matter of 'taking', but a matter of submitting to the erotic, sensual, and therefore non-conceptualized object of fascination. In Lacanian terms, what Ruth is proposing is that men, in particular her overly-educated husband, submit to the pre-conceptual sphere

[306] *The Homecoming*, p.60.
[307] *The Homecoming*, pp.60-61.

of life (i.e. the Real and Imaginary realms), which means responding, in fact, submitting, to the sensual appeal and rhythm of the female body. Clearly, this objection is not to 'score' a point in an intellectual debate, but rather it constitutes a plea to the men around her; this is because her life, over the last six years, has been, on an emotional and erotic level, barren:

> I was born quite near here.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Then…six years ago, I went to America.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> It's all rock. And sand. It stretches…so far…everywhere you look. And there's lots of insects there.[308]

Ruth's images of desolation betray how unsatisfying, indeed life-denying it has been to live with her desiccated 'insect' of a husband in the States. Still, there is a glimmer of hope in her terse recounting of her past, almost as through a flower had emerged in the desert, as she mentions that she was born near this house, and so her return might constitute a 'homecoming' to her alienated sexual self.

Ruth's riposte to the question of 'taking' the table easily suggests that she, herself, is ready to be 'taken'. Yet, the play as a whole problematizes the notions of sexual dominance and of submission. While it is indeed true that Ruth later agrees to the family's proposition of becoming a prostitute at an establishment in Greek Street, her contractual submission does involve, as much as such a role permits, drawing up her own terms; after all, a woman that warned Lenny that she would 'take' him if he

[308] *The Homecoming*, p.61.

took the water away was never going to be without any power or influence. In reality, Ruth manages to exercise a great deal of influence over Max's two sons, Joey and Lenny, as it has been intimated earlier that she is a symbolic substitute for their mother, who has, in a sense, 'returned'. In this concluding part of my reading, it is therefore necessary to explain the precise reasons why she exerts, in each case, a singular fascination upon them; furthermore, it must also be explained why Teddy fails to rescue his wife from the fate of becoming a prostitute, and simply walks away to become a stranger, once again, to the family.

In his study on Pinter's examination of cultural power, Marc Silverstein succinctly characterizes Joey's relationship to women, which he attributes to Max's son being still entrapped at the Oedipal stage:

> Joey's fluctuating movement between identification and aggressivity characterizes Joey's relationship with women and further attests to his entrapment within the Oedipal complex. When the mother refuses to associate the phallus with the father, she herself becomes the quintessential object of the child's desire, the object with whom it identifies.[309]

Silverstein intimates that Joey is 'caught' in a dialectic of identification and aggressivity, which implies that he is primarily situated at the Imaginary stage, as he either merges with some object, viewed as a specular other, or he rebels, in an antagonistic fashion, against it. A good example of this is when he is standing in front of a mirror, shadowboxing:

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[309] Marc Silverstein, *Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power* (Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1993), p.91.

> JOEY *is in front of a mirror. He is doing some slow limbering-up exercises. He stops, combs his hair, carefully. He then shadowboxes, heavily, watching himself in the mirror.*[310]

Joey is the most taciturn, and yet the most physically aggressive of the three sons, which can be explained by his failure to be situated in the Symbolic realm. This 'failure' (which, in truth, resides more with Jessie and Max) has two important implications. Firstly, Joey is unable to articulate, at any great length, the nature of his subjectivity; indeed, sometimes he expresses the poverty of his subjectivity, such as when he says, 'Feel a bit hungry'[311], as this is a simple, declarative statement that nevertheless omits any claim of ownership over his experience.

Secondly, although Joey works in demolition and boxes in the evening, Silverstein perceptively notes that his violent acts, particularly his sexually violent behaviour, is a displacement of his 'frustrated desire for identification with the mother'.[312] Proof that this is so is that Joey does not 'go the whole hog' with Ruth, and he explains his reasons as follows:

> I've been the whole hog plenty of times. Sometimes…you can be happy…and not go the whole hog. Now and again…you can be happy…without going any hog.[313]

Joey's remark that he can be happy sometimes 'without going any hog' hints at the fact that, when a woman represents his mother, his preference, if not his compulsion,

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[310] *The Homecoming*, p.22.
[311] *The Homecoming*, p.24.
[312] Silverstein, p.91.
[313] *The Homecoming*, p.76.

is to merge with her, which is the very opposite of penetration. Since Joey was one of Jessie's phallic objects, he has never had to submit to the Symbolic order, which would otherwise wrench him away from his mother, only to then, according to patriarchal ideology, empower him with the authority and legislative powers of the Name-of-the-Father. In Ruth's case, he is unwilling, or perhaps unable, to penetrate her, as he wishes to return to that wordless state of union, which is his true home. Luckily enough for Joey, at the end of the play, he does, in fact, achieve this 'homecoming' once Teddy has left:

> JOEY *walks slowly across the room. He kneels at her chair. She touches his head, lightly. He puts his head in her lap.*[314]

Moving now onto the more loquacious and sinister brother, Lenny, he, too, eventually submits to Ruth's charms, in spite of greeting her with a welcoming that was undercut with the threat of violence. According to Silverstein, the reason for this change is that Lenny bears a similar 'Oedipal burden', which in his case means that he has a fractious relationship with the Symbolic, since he is poised 'between' the Symbolic and the Real:

> Lenny's verbal facility, his penchant for elaborate narrative and ability to wield words as weapons suggests a higher degree of integration within the linguistic field than Joey enjoys; yet, if more articulate than his brother, Lenny nevertheless bears a similar Oedipal burden that problematizes his relation to the symbolic. Like Joey, Lenny does not possess full membership in the

[314] *The Homecoming*, p.88.

> symbolic; unlike Joey, who exists in the no-man's land between the symbolic and the imaginary, Lenny occupies a position on the border between the symbolic and the real.[315]

Shortly after this explication, Silverstein goes on to explain how this liminal position concretely affects Lenny's being-in-the-world:

> What does it mean, then, to assert that Lenny inhabits a border region between the symbolic and the real? In such a region the real constantly threatens to outstrip the symbolic, not because of any lack of signifiers, but rather because the signifiers no longer provide an epistemological framework guaranteeing the certainty of the world they attempt to symbolize.[316]

What Silverstein intimates is that, for Lenny, there is a 'slippage' between signifier and signified, in the sense that the Real continually resists being completely 'captured' and defined by the symbolic; instead, the connection seems tenuous and has to be enforced in an act of representational violence, which is why, for example, Lenny does not appreciate the oddity of simply deciding that the woman at the docks was 'diseased'. Indeed, in his pseudo-philosophical exchange with Teddy, Lenny articulates, using the example of a table, the problems he has with representation:

> LENNY: Take a table. Philosophically speaking, what is it?
>
> TEDDY: A table.

[315] Silverstein, p.92.
[316] Silverstein, p.92.

> LENNY: Ah. You mean it's nothing else but a table. Well, some people would envy your certainty…All right…*take* it, take a table, but once you've taken it, what are you going to do with it? Once you've got hold of it, where are you going to take it?[317]

For Lenny, the signifier 'table' cannot take 'hold' of the thing called table, and so it seems a contrived relationship, where the object's 'realness' resists any kind of linguistic imposition. Now, as was described earlier, this philosophical discussion has an underlying erotic subtext to it, as Lenny's inability to 'take' anything through symbolic capture renders him impotent when confronting women. More fully, this passivity, this painful inability to 'take' a woman, can be traced back to his close relationship to his mother, and his contemptuous attitude towards his father. From what has been said in the play, it is clear that Jessie did not treat Max's word as law, which meant that Lenny, like his two siblings, did not feel that he needed to submit to the commanding power of the word. Consequently, language fails to possess a conclusive form of signifying power for Lenny, which, in the terms of the play, leaves him open to being dominated by Ruth, as he cannot rely upon the conventional linguistic/ideological support that portrays men as the aggressive and penetrative partner. On the contrary, women, like Ruth, who are perceived as both sexy and protective (in other words, mother/whore figures) can easily 'take' him, as he neither can assert, with any conviction, his phallic power, nor can he resist the appeal of the domineering feminine touch. Proof, if any were needed, that Ruth has won the battle (even if she has lost the war) is that, in spite of submitting to the proposal of

[317] *The Homecoming*, p.60.

becoming a prostitute, Lenny, in his eagerness to keep her, agrees to her strict stipulations:

> RUTH: How many rooms would this flat have?
>
> LENNY: Not many.
>
> RUTH: I would want at least three rooms and a bathroom.
>
> LENNY: You wouldn't need three rooms and a bathroom.
>
> MAX: She'd need a bathroom.
>
> LENNY: But not three rooms
>
> *Pause.*
>
> RUTH: Oh, I would. Really.
>
> LENNY: Two would do.
>
> RUTH: No. Two wouldn't be enough.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> I'd want a dressing-room, a rest-room, and a bedroom.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> LENNY: All right, we'll get you a flat with three rooms and a bathroom.[318]

Perhaps the reason why Lenny became a pimp was due to his awareness, on some half-conscious level, that he did not possess the usual, patriarchal conviction that he had the power to dominate sexually, and so material dominance rescued him from being completely impotent and powerless in the sexual sphere. Whatever the case may be, the notion of contracted sexual relations must have a particular resonance for Lenny, given that all signifying positions, including sexual roles, seem to him to be

[318] *The Homecoming*, p.84-85.

matters of convention that you can 'take', but then 'what are you going to do with it?' In Lenny's case, the answer would be: 'not very much', but at least his role as pimp secures him a means of keeping flirtatious women somewhat under his control, unlike how it was with Jessie, who must have, at times, inadvertently abandoned Lenny to pursue her liaisons. Of course, Ruth intuitively understands Lenny's underlying phantasies which is why playing both mother and whore allows her to secure a contract from him that keeps her content, as she knows he secretly wants a mother figure. His capitulation to her terms at the end of the play is therefore by no means insignificant.

The final brother to be discussed (the 'philosopher' of the family) is, in many respects, the bearer of the heaviest Oedipal burden. In his account of Teddy's notable 'paralysis' of will, Silverstein produces a charge sheet that underscores how ineffectual Teddy is:

> His repeated attempts to withdraw from philosophical argument with Lenny; his comically ineffectual theft of Lenny's cheese-roll as a substitute for direct verbal or physical confrontation; his virtual refusal to intervene in the family's 'assimilation' of Ruth–all of these examples, suggesting a kind of linguistic paralysis, serve to remind us that, like his brothers, Teddy remains trapped in an Oedipal crisis that disqualifies him from fully acceding to the symbolic.[319]

Silverstein is by no means exaggerating Teddy's inability to take decisive action. A particularly cringing example of his 'impotency' is when he declares to his wife that it

[319] Silverstein, p.99.

is perfectly acceptable for Ruth to remain as a 'guest', which is his euphemism for a prostitute:

> Ruth…the family have wanted you to stay, for a little while longer. As a… as a kind of guest. If you like the idea I don't mind. We can manage very easily at home…until you come back.[320]

This passage exemplifies a pitiful example of a man trying, as best as he can, to keep a stiff upper lip in a situation that warrants some kind of demonstration that he loves his wife, and wishes to protect her from what would ordinarily constitute an unenviable fate. Teddy cannot, of course, muster such emotion, essentially because he worships his 'intellectual equilibrium' more than anything else. In the following passage, one can see that he tries to cope with an escalating call for action by uttering a hymn song to detachment:

> You wouldn't understand my works. You wouldn't have the faintest idea of what they were about. You wouldn't appreciate the points of reference. You're way behind. All of you. There's no point in me sending you my works. You'd be lost. It's nothing to do with intelligence. It's a way of being able to look at the world. It's a question of how far you can operate on things and not in things. I mean it's a question of your capacity to ally the two, to relate the two, to balance the two. To see, to be able to *see*! I'm the one who can see. That's why I can write my critical works. Might do you good…have a look at them…see how certain people can view…things…how certain people can

[320] *The Homecoming*, p.83.

> maintain…intellectual equilibrium. Intellectual equilibrium. You're just objects. You just…move about. I can observe it. I can see what you do. It's the same as I do. But you're lost in it. You won't get me being…I won't be lost in it.[321]

Ostensibly, this speech, verging on a sermon, is about the importance of achieving a degree of detachment, as only then can insights be achieved: 'To see, to be able to *see*! I'm the one who can see.' Nevertheless, Teddy's speech reveals many of his deep-seated anxieties and phantasies, which make him such a cold and ineffectual man. For example, his belief in the sovereignty of his own critical reasoning powers is predicated upon the virtues of 'acting on things', where 'things' betrays the appeal of treating the world as some sort of mechanism, with him as the 'enlightened' operator. In fact, Teddy's repeated use of the word 'lost' implies that, if he did not stand against the world in his supposedly dignified and detached manner, he would be annihilated by his merger with an inert and ultimately senseless form of existence. Yet not to be 'lost' in this fashion may rescue his fragile subjectivity from its forever possible descent into a mere 'object', but it comes with a costly existential price: both decisive action and the vicissitudes of love are based upon an investment in people and in situations, and thus they require, if not demand, commitment as opposed to detachment.

Silverstein provides a cogent assessment of Teddy's existential predicament when he remarks:

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[321] *The Homecoming*, pp.69-70.

> Teddy remains trapped between a dependence on Ruth and the paralytic detachment that prevents him achieving 'being' through any kind of decisive and empowering action. His ineffectual attempt to woo Ruth away from the family with the promise that 'you can help me with my lectures when we get back. I would love that' encapsulates this lack of 'being'. Hardly an attractive proposition from Ruth's perspective, Teddy's offer denies her status as an independent entity, while assimilating her as a constitutive element of his self. Paradoxically, however, Teddy's denial of Ruth's human (as opposed to sexual) difference grants her considerable power by defining her as the agent who will transform his lack into plenitude. [322]

I believe that the play, coupled with some insights from Lacanian theory, provides a means of understanding why Teddy has become so ineffectual, as well as so clinically detached from life. Perhaps the most telling remark in relation to this is Sam's comment that Teddy, out of all of the sons, was Jessie's favourite. One can therefore surmise that Teddy keenly felt, even more than the other two, the original bliss of merger with the mother, but, at the same time, this symbiotic relationship would be punctuated by moments of rupture, which would be experienced particularly intensely. Now, since Max never did become, in any consistent and sustained way, the phallic object for Jessie, these moments of rupture became distressing intimations of nothingness, a 'void' at the centre of Teddy's 'being'. This is because ordinarily the father, as phallic object, acts as an existential 'crutch', as a symbolic identification with the paternal provides a means of becoming 'resourceful'; indeed, the child need no longer feel impotent when the mother disappears from his view, as he can become

[322] Silverstein, p.99.

the fascinating object of the (m)Other's desire. In Teddy's case, however, since he was, for an inordinate period of time, his mother's phallic object, he is left with an unenviable existential legacy: he either possesses, according to his phantasy, omnipotent control over his mother, or his mother leaves a conspicuous gap in his being that he feels powerless to remedy.

It is worthwhile to elaborate further upon two of the important implications of Teddy's profound 'lack' at the heart of his 'being'. Firstly, Teddy's fetishizing of reason and of detachment can be explained by his attempt to continue, albeit in a modified form, his phantasy of omnipotence. Given that he originally held the status of phallic object, it is natural for him to assume that, in as far as a solution can be found, it resides within. Indeed, the reasons why he compulsively worships his ability to conceptualise are as follows: a) thinking can be a means to schematize the world in the interests of manipulation (i.e., acting 'on' things); b) thinking, particularly of the most abstract kind, can provide an exultant sense of control, as it deceives the thinker into believing that he need never be 'lost', since his map defies the potentially disruptive power of contingency (to paraphrase Teddy, with such a map, 'the structure isn't affected'); and c) abstractive 'truth' acts as a buffer, as it is a form of mediation that precludes Teddy from slipping into the otherwise engulfing realm of the Real. In truth, however, in spite of the above reasons, his 'philosophical' attitude is still ultimately a sign of impotence, as Teddy is unable to fully accede to the Symbolic realm, where he would have been able to articulate his desires and feelings through the medium of concrete and expressive language. Instead, as far as Pinter is concerned, he is trapped in the alienating and depotentiating discourse of the academician, who, as Ruth intimated, exists in the dry and static world of the 'desert'.

Secondly, the rent in Teddy's 'being' also accounts for his otherwise inexplicable concessionary behaviour towards his ogre-like family. Although Teddy desperately needs Ruth to fill the lack in his 'being', he is nevertheless quite incapable of considering his wife as an autonomous person. Indeed, it is this narcissism, born out of his original status as Jessie's phallic object, which prevents him from attempting, in any shape or form, some kind of rescuing of Ruth, because, for Teddy, women belong to him as an extension of himself. In other words, Teddy's attitude towards Ruth betrays much pain, but even greater perplexity, as he never once in the play was able to understand that his wife might have needs that do not coincide with his own, and therefore he is unable to make any sort of plea that speaks to Ruth's deepest and most abiding wishes. On the contrary, it is Ruth who makes a plea, dressed as a cliché, when she says, as Teddy leaves, 'Don't become a stranger'[323], as she understands that, with her assertion of her own needs, her husband now sees her as a defamiliarized object that he can no longer operate 'on'.

IV

In his study of masculinity, David Buchbinder explains what is meant by the term 'symbolic patriarchy':

> A symbolic patriarchy is a social structure or community within which power is dispersed among the male subjects. Such power is not necessarily vested self-evidently and officially in a single male individual, although often, of course, we do find men heading large organizations and corporations as well as governments.[324]

[323] *The Homecoming*, p.101.
[324] David Buchbinder, *Studying Men and Masculinities* (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), p.67.

Buchbinder's description draws attention to the fact that a symbolic patriarchy, in contrast to a formal one, does not posit a patriarch, whose position is secure, and whose power is absolute. He offers the following qualification:

> Rather than see masculine power as something owned by individual males it is more productive to think of such power as something held out as promised to men, and as always only provisionally held by individual males.[325]

What Buchbinder is essentially describing here is a distinction between inflexible structure and mobile individual position. He refines this distinction when he explains the differences between the patriarchal order and the patriarchal economy:

> The first of these [the patriarchal order] is a social and conceptual structure that is capable of adapting to current social, economic, and cultural conditions. As a structure, therefore, patriarchy organizes sexual and social identity both differentially and preferentially. It thus produces gendered subjectivity within an order of rank and precedence that establishes not only the privileging of men over women, but also some men over others, on such grounds as race, social class, physique, or sexual orientation.
>
> The second aspect of patriarchy concerns the ways in which the patriarchal order generates and distributes the flows of power within both social and institutional organizations. This we may call the patriarchal economy. Its

[325] Buchbinder, p.67.

> connection to the patriarchal order is so close that one defines the other, such that they operate complementarily and synchronously.[326]

When one considers the patriarchal order, it is clear, from the term 'patriarchy' itself, that the symbolic and social space par excellence that preserves this order is the institution known as the family. From a psycho-political point of view, what lends the family institution its privileged position as 'enforcer' of the patriarchal order is that the interlocking symbolic relationships provide a means for the male organ to be equated with the potential to acquire and hold phallic power:

> Instead of considering the penis as an absolute guarantee of masculine power, let us think of the actual, fleshy penis as a kind of promissory note to its possessor, or like the lottery ticket that admits the possessor of a penis to the chance of winning millions of dollars, but does not guarantee that success. The possession of a penis is simply a necessary precondition to the accrual of power under a patriarchal order. Power itself is actually vested elsewhere, in a symbol called the phallus.[327]

Of course, phallic power is not a biological given, but, from a psychoanalytical perspective, a fusion of phantasy with a contingent social order. Lacanian theory, as we have noted, describes the relationship between the familial patriarchal order and the familial patriarchal economy quite well. Regarding the former, the family is based upon the father possessing power and authority (his word, in a literal sense, is law); in particular, the male child (the patriarch-to-be) construes his father's power as a form

[326] Buchbinder, p.69.
[327] Buchbinder, p.74.

of ‘fascination’, in the sense that he exerts a magnetic attraction upon mother’s desire. Since the child is learning that he cannot exert complete and unqualified control over his mother, this recognition of someone, ostensibly similar to himself, possessing such power is not unwelcome. Yet this case of triangulated desire is predicated upon father being dominant and mother being subordinate, and so these phantasies represent a consolidation of the patriarchal order itself. Indeed, as long as the symbolic relationships are based upon male=plenitude=power and female= lack= subordination then, to paraphrase Teddy, the structure is not affected. All that we have instead is a patriarchal economy, where sons traditionally supplant fathers as head of households, and women are exchanged between father and husband.

In terms of the psycho-political significance of Pinter’s play, *Family Voices*, as we have noted, the father’s absence, in the emotional sense, created, in the son, a ‘negative father’ complex. Indeed, since *Family Voices* could, in one sense, be retitled *Lost Sons/Absent Fathers* (as it is about the reasons for a rupture in the patriarchal order) no character, male or female, is therefore able to accede to the symbolic role of Father, and thus no character possesses any authority. This is for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the son (Voice 1) has no past or present male role model that can define, in the Name-of-the-Father, what constitutes the ‘law’ of being a man; couple this with Voice 1’s almost incestuous attachment to his mother, and we have the predicament of a young man unable to gain independence from the Desire-of-the-Mother, as he can find no definition of phallic power that he can ‘acquire’, which would grant him authority over a symbolic substitute for his mother. This scenario inevitably constitutes a regressive return to the family home, and to childish dependence.

Secondly, Riley defines another kind of ‘lost son’, according to Pinter, as he exemplifies the torturous manoeuvring of a homosexual in a heterosexual, patriarchal

order. More fully, although Riley may be a policeman, and therefore an upholder of patriarchal law, he cannot *be* the Symbolic Father, as he lacks the typical ideologically-defined criteria: the ability to marry a woman and produce children, which perpetuates the patriarchal order. Since he is also apparently treated as a pariah by women, then his only hope of constructing a family is by constructing a sort of homosocial order predicated upon intergenerational homosexual desire i.e., older men linking up with 'slender lads'. This is indeed a variant of incestuous maternal desire.

Finally, the emotionally absent fathers, Dad and Mr Withers, were unable to connect with their 'sons' and 'initiate' them into manhood, either because they allowed them to become too close to their mothers, or they could not articulate in any clear and coherent fashion, what it is to 'graduate' into becoming a man. In both cases, where the difficulty lies is that these two men are emasculated men, who live (or lived) their lives either without any attempt or ability to educate their son. Indeed, what goes forever unsaid, or what remains obscure and incoherent, still has the same disabling effect: lost sons cannot accede to the only position of authority and of relative independence that the patriarchal order confers: to become the Symbolic Father and acquire the ideological markers of phallic power.

Moving now onto *The Homecoming*, this does not so much focus on the 'hole' in the patriarchal order that is caused by lost sons/emasculated fathers; rather, it makes a related point, as it highlights, through a defamiliarizing sequence of events in the patriarchal economy, the overall intransigence of the patriarchal order, since it is the mother-figure that accedes to the role of patriarch as matriarch. More fully, as we have noted, all three of Max's sons were, to varying degrees, unable to proceed to being completely situated in the Symbolic realm, and consequently, they lacked that deep and abiding conviction in their own dominance and authority (or, to put it

alternatively, they lacked phallic power). When Ruth arrives, she instinctively recognises both the maternal and paternal deficit in the family, and she exploits this singular situation to her benefit. What she understands is that, if she assumes the form of an ambiguous mother/whore figure, then she can rise to the status of matriarch in this family, as the two 'castrated' sons have a compulsive need to assume proprietorship over their 'mother,' but they lack any ability to assert themselves through sustained and domineering action; in other words, providing that Ruth submits to their sexual needs and need for intimacy, she can 'call the shots' in other respects, as she intuits their underlying helplessness.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to believe that this ascension to matriarch constitutes some kind of transgressive assertion of 'female power'. Rather, Ruth's 'promotion' to matriarch is, in essence, a 'move' in the patriarchal economy that still preserves the patriarchal order. Silverstein explains why:

> Ruth effectively disables and reconstitutes the patriarchal family, but, in what amounts to the play's supreme irony, she can only achieve her victory through the exercise of phallic power: the power to castrate and the power to fascinate…Her empowerment disrupts the patriarchal ideology that equates the 'masculine' and the phallus, while, at the same time, her own mimicry and appropriation of the Father's' hallucinatory attributes' secure the status of the phallus as the master signifier of cultural power. Rather than a victory over phallic power, the reconfiguration of the family as a matriarchal unit provides a new and stronger channel for that power than did the attenuated patriarchal unit over which Max presided…To put this another way: it is not

> the mother, but the symbolic father who makes the homecoming that gives the play its title.[328]

It may seem quite a stretch to equate Ruth with the symbolic father position, but there are several key indicators that this is so: these centre upon her aggressive sexuality (her threat (promise?) to 'take' Lenny), her word being taken as law, and her use of her body as an object of fascination that 'performs' with the intent of seizing their attention. In short, Ruth acts as a signifier for dominant activity, whether it be sexual assertion, or declarative discourse.

One final qualification should be made in this discussion, though. It is difficult to forget that, at the conclusion of this play, Ruth agrees to go to Greek Street to become a prostitute for the material benefit of the family. Pinter himself does not see this pact as binding, nor does he view it as a limitation on the kind of freedom that she possesses:

> She does not become a harlot. At the end of the play she's in possession of a certain kind of freedom. She can do what she wants, and it is not at all certain that she will go to Greek Street. But even if she did, she would not be a harlot in her mind.[329]

Pinter's remark that Ruth is in 'possession of a certain kind of freedom' may seem puzzling, as a prostitute is often depicted as the epitome of objectification of women, since they are reduced to an object of trade. What must be kept in mind, however, is that, whilst Ruth is objectified as a woman, the freedom she possesses is of the

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[328] Silverstein, p.106.
[329] Pinter, interview with William Packard, *First Stage*, 6 no.2 (1967), pp.79-85 (p.82).

unusual kind, as she holds the symbolic position of Father in the family. Consequently, if Ruth decided to not become a harlot, then she could exercise her phallic power to withdraw from the pact, and so Pinter is quite right that it is by no means certain that she would go to Greek Street. In fact, it is clear, as the curtain comes down, that this family are so dependent on her in an emotional sense that they would do anything to prevent her becoming a 'stranger' again.

Conclusion

Let me now briefly summarise the general conclusions of this chapter. I intimated in my introduction that Pinter is primarily concerned with the family as the primary supporter of what can be termed the patriarchal order. This thematic foundation must be kept in mind in any summary of how these plays explore the psycho-political study of family structures.

Considering the first play, *Family Voices*, Pinter foregrounds the painful predicament of the 'lost' son who has been burdened with an emotionally 'absent' father. More fully, what Pinter intimates is this: without an emotionally 'present' father, the son is faced with a world whose paternal law is scribbled incoherently, and so he cannot succeed to the role of the Symbolic Father, since he knows not how to become a man. In such circumstances, the son must, like Voice 1, return to the expectant and longing arms of mother. There is, Pinter intimates, no other 'place' for him to go, as independence from the maternal dyad, in a patriarchal order, is predicated upon father 'modelling' manhood. Overall, the insidious 'sovereignty' of the patriarchal order is affirmed, as the son's fate is poised between the only two possibilities that this ideological structure permits: either possess the symbolic representative of the phallus, and achieve power, or lapse into powerless dependency.

In terms of *The Homecoming*, this focuses on the patriarchal order as well, but, in this play, the particular emphasis is on the role of the Symbolic Father, and on women's subjection within this order. More fully, Pinter uses the dramatic situation to illustrate the following fundamental aspect of the patriarchal order, with its inherent power relations: Ruth's almost transgressive succession to the role of patriarch-as-matriarch underscores that women are usually subjected to the disempowered position of wife/mother. Pinter intimates that this disempowered role is due to the patriarchal order channelling the 'economy' of desire in such a fashion that the mother acts as a 'signpost' for where the real power and authority is to be found: in the possession of the 'phallic' father. In this particular case, however, Ruth is able to subvert the usual 'flow' of the patriarchal economy, as none of the 'unholy' trinity of sons had resolved their Oedipal conflicts, and the father's word was never taken as law. Still, even with these evident 'fault-lines' that are open to manipulation, Ruth does not and cannot affect the patriarchal structure: at the end of the play, the 'sovereignty' of the patriarchal order is nevertheless confirmed, because, as Teddy might say, 'The structure wasn't affected'.

Chapter 5: 'The Scum or the Essence?'- A Summing Up

In Pinter's only novel, *The Dwarfs*, the character Len asks, during a pseudo-philosophical conversation about identity, whether he has known 'the scum or the essence?'[330] In this final chapter of the thesis, I must humbly declare that what I have examined of Pinter's work neither constitutes the 'essence' of his oeuvre, nor has it (thankfully) descended into mere rhetorical posturing that reveals nothing about some of his most central themes and obsessions.

I have divided my concluding chapter into two sections for ease of reading. First of all, I explain in the initial section how the general Pinteresque psycho-political relationship assumes the form of an 'I-It' relation i.e., self against others; after this, I append a summary of how chapter themes of this thesis can be shown to be related to one another, primarily because they involve at some level some kind of 'I-It' division. Secondly, I offer two possible critiques of Pinter's psycho-political position, which contest his central premise: that it is the case that psychological 'realities' support from the 'inside-out' oppressive power relations. More specifically, the social materialist position, as represented by commentators such as David Smail, would argue that there are such entities as psychological realities, but they are entirely manipulated and therefore shaped by outside forces; he would not, in other words, agree with Pinter's 'depth' psychology, which suggests that power relations are supported by not 'mere' motivations (what Smail terms as 'interests'), but primarily by psychological defences and phantasies. As for the other counter-argument that I provide, this assumes a constructivist bent, which posits that there is no private, 'inner' realm, but, in truth, what we know and feel are social constructions masked as psychological 'realities'.

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[330] Pinter, *The Dwarfs*, rev. edn (London: Faber, 1992), p.152.

I

The 'I' versus the 'It'

Writing about one of the two primary orientations towards the world, Martin Buber describes how the 'I-It' relation is premised upon a utilitarian attitude:

> The primary relation of man to the world of *It* is comprised in experiencing, which continually reconstitutes the world, and using, which leads the world to its manifold aim, the sustaining, relieving, and equipping of human life. In proportion to the growing extent of the world of *It*, ability to experience and use it must also grow.[331]

For Buber, the 'I-It' relation involves the objectification of the world (a division into subject vs object), and therefore it inherently requires the self-division of the 'imperial' knowing subject, as recognition of the other's subjectivity and of possible commonality is the beginning of an 'I-Thou' relationship; thus Buber asserts, 'The primary word 'I-It' can never be spoken with the whole being'.[332] Furthermore, Buber contends that, since the 'I-It' orientation requires the other to be used, the other is only considered in terms of their general properties (writing about the 'I-Thou' he suggests that, in this case, 'I have been seized by the power of exclusiveness'[333]), which means that the 'I' treats the other according to past categorizations:

> The 'I' of the primary word 'I-It', that is, the 'I' faced by no 'Thou', but surrounded by a multitude of contents has no present, only the past. Put it

[331] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p.36.
[332] Buber, p.11.
[333] Buber, p.14.

> another way, in as far as man rests satisfied with the things that he experiences and uses he lives in the past, and his relationship has no present content. He has nothing but objects.[334]

It is not difficult to appreciate that Pinter's characters, with a few notable exceptions, relate to one another in an 'I-It' fashion. The most comprehensive reason for why this is so is that he is a psycho-political writer, who explored, in his works, the psychological factors, which support oppressive power relations. More fully, oppressive power relations by definition require the dehumanization, and therefore the objectification of oppressed groups; furthermore, and less obviously, these power relationships are based on the use of projection, which involves supposedly unwholesome characteristics being attributed to those considered to be 'less' than them. Unsurprisingly, such 'I-It' power relations require the presence of self-division within the objectifying group.

In terms of how the 'I-It' manifests itself in relation to the three main themes of this thesis, firstly, an authoritarian character, such as Nicholas, treats dissidents with nothing but contempt, as they embody, as 'It', his underlying powerlessness that is the Janus-faced partner to his doubt-free faith in his ideals; indeed, the dissident becomes a repository of his profound doubt about the absolute veracity of his ideals, and they also embody his deep-seated sense of isolation from the world. In addition, the authoritarian's body 'armour' is a means of maintaining a literal boundary between that which is oneself and those who are objectified, due to them 'containing' projected 'material', as 'pathogenic'.

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[334] Buber, p.18.

Secondly, the territorial imperative, as Pinter conceives it, is premised upon the erection of rigid boundaries, as the home is construed as part of the self, whilst that which is external is deemed as 'other' or 'It'; as the extensive readings in chapter three illustrate, this leads to various forms of self-alienation as Buber might have predicted. Another feature of the territorial imperative that links with this idea of 'I-It' is that the pathological transitional space, with its extensive use of phantasy, requires that their homes are treated as mere objects that satisfy the individual's deficiency needs. Consequently, their acquisitive mentality means they do not so much relate to their rooms, but rather master them. One of the important and tragic implications of this is that they also try to do this to anyone else living in their rooms, such that no bond between them can be formed, or at least developed.

Finally, the family, with its patriarchal order, is an objectifying structure *par excellence*, as the parents are construed in a phallocentric, and therefore objectifying manner i.e., the mother is an embodiment of 'lack' and the father is the possessor of that which represents plenitude and guarantees power. Since the patriarchal order assigns clearly demarcated roles that are never subverted by the patriarchal economy (even Ruth is patriarch-as-matriarch), family members are stereotyped and therefore objectified.

Authoritarianism and Patriarchy: The Fatherland

In her writings, the Chilean feminist Julieta Kirkwood described the family as an authoritarian structure:

> Today it is more evident to many sectors that authoritarianism is more than a political problem, that it has roots and causes in all of the social structures, and that one must question and not reject many elements and contents that

> were previously considered 'political' because they are attributed to day-to-day private life. Today people have begun saying that the family and the socialization of children are authoritarian.[335]

In light of Kirkwood's positing of the family as an authoritarian structure, it is worth examining this supposed connection between the two, because, just as it is important to not conflate them on a theoretical level, it is equally important not to do this when reviewing Pinter's work. In my view, there are several ways that Pinter relates the two structures without overly identifying them. Firstly, and most obviously, he portrays in plays like *Party Time* how authoritarian societies assign women to the domestic sphere, where they can 'serve' their husbands, and act as a 'buffer' that defends them from 'impure' influences. Overall, this social structure is as patriarchal as much as it is authoritarian, as it is based upon dichotomous schematization, which is a trademark of the authoritarian personality; furthermore, assigning women to the domestic sphere means that men become patriarchs, as they are 'masters' of the outside world as much as they are in their own home.

Secondly, whilst state officials like Nicholas consider their rulers as father figures, father substitutes such as even Ruth behave as though they are the legislating force in the family (i.e., in the Name-of-the-Father). Evidently, there is a correspondence between the two, according to Pinter, which is a viewpoint also supported by certain psychoanalytical schools of thought: in Lacanian psychoanalysis, for example, the father as Symbolic Father possesses that which signifies power, and this means that he is the authority, if not quite the authoritarian, in the family. Indeed, Pinter's plays suggest a way to maintain a certain distinction between the two (even if

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[335] Julieta Kirkwood, qtd in Sonia E. Alvarez's, *Engendering Democracy in Brazil: Women's Movements in Transition Politics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.7.

it cannot be enforced to a great degree), as his works imply that authoritarians are not simply the product of the usual Oedipal resolution; rather, like Nicholas, their Oedipal submission to the status quo is compounded by an earlier fault-line at the time that delusions of omnipotence are ordinarily resolved. This implies that these 'fatherland' figures do not only require the Oedipal-based promise of power, but they also need the ontological stability that comes from being able to identify with a stable, inflexible worldview.

Finally, Pinter typically depicts the family in terms of smothering mothers and non-nurturing fathers. One of the important implications of this is that neither parent is able to help the individual achieve any kind of independence and individuality; in fact, unless the individual regresses to maternal dependency, he cannot exist without some 'direction', which therefore makes him more susceptible to following the guidance of some kind of authoritarian institution as a substitute.

Patriarchy and Territory: The Intruder as Familiar Stranger

Jane Wong Yeang Chui describes the concept of the 'intruder' as being one that ordinarily possesses a negative connotation:

> The term 'intrude' implies negative connotations, and 'intruders' in Pinter's plays are ascribed a set of qualities that are contingent on social stereotypes: they are base, obnoxious, deceptive, scheming, and they bear ill intentions. These ideas of the intruders create a dichotomy that distinguishes victim and victimizer, which leads to interpretations of the stranger-intruder as a necessarily oppressive figure.[336]

[336] Jane Wong Yeang Chui, *Affirming the Absurd in Harold Pinter* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), p.7.

The main point Chui makes is a straightforward one: by definition intruders are unwelcome, and they act as oppressors, because, at the very least, their presence is an imposition upon those who own that piece of territory. But Chui also makes a more subtle point, which is that it would be a mistake to construe the 'Pinter' intruder as exclusively an oppressive force. More fully, what we see time and again in a Pinter play is that he depicts intruders as 'familiar strangers', who 'carry' the burden of the main character's projections, which means, in essence, that their crossing the threshold implies the 'disowned' moving into the realm of the 'owned'. Consequently, from a psychological point of view, these 'intruders' are oppressors in as far as they are tangible reminders of a character's self-alienation, which was caused by their bad faith (i.e., self-deception). They are, in short, reminders of that which they have taken pains not to remember i.e., they are embodiments of the return of the repressed (for example, even in the case of Stanley's encounter with Goldberg and McCann, these persecutory emissaries are also oppressors in the above sense, as they represent to some extent Stanley's disowned social conscience).

More generally, this motif of the 'familiar stranger' often appears in Pinter's room plays for a very specific psycho-political reason: irrespective of the particular play, if the work explores the themes of the 'territorial imperative' and/or that of patriarchal dominance, then the notion of the 'intruder', the 'familiar stranger' is the form that the 'I-It' power relation manifests itself. This is because those who protect their territory assume a domineering attitude towards their intruders (and I use the word 'their' advisedly), as they try to master or conquer the embodiment of that which they have sought to keep repressed. Indeed, this domineering style (turning the world, in the words of Edward, into a 'hunting ground'[337]) is symptomatic of a

[337] *A Slight Ache*, p.167.

patriarchal worldview that believes it must make the Other submit, even if that Other is a misrecognised Other i.e., an embodiment of their own alienated self.

Authoritarianism and Territoriality: Body armour

The authoritarian, as Pinter has depicted him, is, in his very being, a divisive man: he must see the world as divided into 'right' and 'wrong', the 'good' and the 'bad'. Furthermore, on a literal and territorial level, he must also divide the world according to his projections, which means that he defends himself against being 'infiltrated' by using whatever represents his embodied boundaries (i.e., usually his body, but, in a hyper-inflated fashion, it can also encompass his country). In the play *Party Time*, this inter-relationship between the autocratic personality and territoriality is foregrounded the most with the idea of a 'body armour', as it was noted that those in power 'contain' themselves from those that are oppressed not only out of concern for safety, but also due to their belief in their own moral superiority. In general, the defence of territory serves as a means of preventing being 'contaminated', which is what one would expect from groups that use projection as their main psychological defence.

II

Pushed from Within or Pulled from Without: A Question of 'Proximity'

One of the central axioms of David Smail's social materialist theory of mental distress concerns the importance of distal powers in shaping human conduct:

> The societal operation of power and interest is immeasurably more important in understanding human conduct than are the components of personal 'psychology'.[338]

[338] David Smail, *Power, Interest and Psychology: Elements of a Social Materialist Understanding of Distress*, 2nd edn (Monmouth: PCCS, 2007), p.21.

Smail expands upon this point when he describes his two key theoretical concepts: power and interest:

> The person exists as an embodied being in a material environment that is structured physically and (more important for our purposes) socially. The principal dynamic of social structure is *power*, which is transmitted through *interest*. The most powerful influences that end up impinging upon the individual tend to be those furthest from him/her i.e., economic, political and cultural power. These are mediated by lesser powers closer to the individual, ultimately via other individuals encountered in families, social groups, workplaces etc.[339]

Firstly, Smail argues that distal power relations shape more proximate power structures, such that the latter, more 'visible' form of power is only but an intermediary. Consequently, since traditional psychology's emphasises the inner world of motivation, will and phantasy as the basis of human conduct, it is (unwittingly) complicit in an ideological distortion of material reality:

> Far from helping people understand how their conduct is construed by the actions of powers well beyond their ken, psychology focuses them instead on an 'inner world' of ideality that doesn't even escape the confines of their own skulls.[340]

[339] Smail, p.26.
[340] Smail, p.32.

Secondly, due to Smail's conviction that it is outside forces that shape human conduct, he suggests that the central psychological concept of drive must be radically revised as the manipulation of interest:

> The crucial theoretical point I'm trying to make is that by conceiving of 'drives' as 'interests' we turn traditional psychology inside out, so that rather than seeing individuals as pushed from within by various urges and desires for which, ultimately, they are personally responsible, they are pulled from without, by the social manipulation of, in the last analysis, inescapable biological features of being human.[341]

Smail's social materialist understanding of power relations (in particular the relationship between power structures and biological needs) is certainly ideologically opposed to the worldview of Pinter's poetic realism/psycho-political drama. This is mainly because Pinter's drama implies that biological needs manifested as psychological phantasies and motivations (the 'inner' world) support and shape power structures (the 'outer' world). Unlike Smail, Pinter adheres to a metaphysics of depth, as he construes oppressive power relationships to be (at least partly) symptomatic of an underlying psychopathology in the body politic.

It is not relevant to the present discussion to determine which one (if any) is correct. Nevertheless, it is instructive to consider what potential weaknesses Smail's position uncovers in Pinter's psycho-political understanding of power. In general, Pinter's emphasis on the inner world implies that any power structures that he explores have to be proximate, 'visible' relations; indeed, Pinter's room-based drama,

[341] Smail, p.35.

with its hothouse bed of 'intimacy', precludes any extensive examination of distal powers. If Smail's top-down model happens to be correct about how power is organised, then this would therefore mean that Pinter's inability to portray distal powers implies that he is unable to not only provide any idea of what supports the oppressive power relations, but he also fails to supply a coherent sense of how people's interests are manipulated by those distal powers. These omissions indeed provide one explanation for Pinter's political pessimism, as the underlying causal factors would be obscured by his ideological position.

The 'Myth' of the Inner-outer

Smail's social materialist understanding of power is still premised upon the idea (some might say the myth) of an inner, private reality in relationship with a 'moulding' outer world. This philosophical position was, however, subject to extensive critique in the twentieth century, most notably by the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Although his arguments are involved, and are not particularly relevant to our discussion here, one of his rebuttals of the 'myth' of the inner-outer takes the form of critiquing the 'transport' model of human communication i.e., the theory that language acts as a public carrier of meaning, which is then 'unpacked' by the recipient in his private inner world. Godfrey Vesey provides the following Wittgensteinian riposte to this view, which asserts that the 'transport' model leads to scepticism about meaning:

> It is not difficult to see what are the implications of the 'transporting ideas' model of linguistic communication. If, as the advocates of the theory hold, ideas and thoughts are 'inner' and 'private', then how can a speaker and a hearer, a writer and a reader, ever know that the ideas and thoughts that are

> evoked by an utterance are the same as the ideas and thoughts expressed by it? According to the theory, one is never in a position to compare them. One cannot see into another's mind.[342]

According to Wittgenstein, such deconstructions of the idea of the 'inner-outer' proves that language does not 'carry' meaning, but rather that it is an expression of otherwise non-linguistic behavioural responses. One of the most important implications of this viewpoint is therefore that our conduct is only meaningful in as far as it is expressible in the form of societal constructions: there cannot be an unmediated biological (i.e., private) realm that shapes and is shaped by society.

Clearly, Pinter's poetic drama relies upon the 'transport' theory, as his positing of an unconscious means that all communication is the carrier of overdetermined meaning–in fact, this accounts for Pinter's rich use of subtextual communications. Yet, assuming that the Wittgensteinian view is correct, Pinter's account has the propensity to reify human conduct in as far as it manifests itself in certain oppressive power structures; this is because he explains oppressive power relations as a match for corresponding 'underlying' pathological inner traits. However, as Wittgenstein might argue, this is to overlook that our power relations, in as far as they are 'disciplinary' forms of behaviour, are social constructions through and through. Thus, this social constructivist understanding of power, for example, undermines any claim that the patriarchal order rests upon any essential foundation in human psychology/biology. Pinter, in contrast, seems to suggest that the patriarchal order reigns 'supreme', irrespective of even some singular shifts in the patriarchal economy (i.e., Ruth's acquirement of the role of the Symbolic Father), which

[342] Godfrey Vesey, *Inner and Outer: Essays on a Philosophical Myth* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1991), pp.191-192.

highlights, once again, that his psycho-political perspective may be unduly deterministic.

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